Oriental Bird Club

Bulletin 36 • December 2002

The Oriental Bird Club aims to:

- ■ encourage an interest in the birds of the Oriental Region and their conservation
- ■ liaise with and promote the work of existing regional societies
- ■ collate and publish material on Oriental birds

Two bulletins and a journal, *Forktail*, are published annually.

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Membership of the Club is open to all and costs £15 per annum (£10 reduced rate for nationals living in Oriental countries who cannot afford the full rate), £20 Family, £25 Supporting Member (funding one Oriental member in addition to ordinary membership), £25 Libraries and academic institutions, and £45 Business Supporters. Special arrangements for payment exist in USA, Thailand and India. To join or for further details please contact the Membership Secretary, Oriental Bird Club, P.O. Box 324, Bedford, MK42 0WG, UK.

OBC Email Address
mail@orientalbirdclub.org

OBC Web Site
http://www.orientalbirdclub.org/

Cover photo:
Orange-flanked Bush Robin *Tarsiger cyanurus* by Tim Loseby

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- **Handbook of the Birds of the World.** Volume 7: Jacamars to Woodpeckers. *Edited by Josep del Hoyo, Andrew Elliott and Jordi Sargatal.* Frank Lambert
- **Pheasants, Partridges and Grouse: a Guide to the Pheasants, Partridges, Quails, Grouse, Guineafowl, Buttonquails and Sandgrouse of the World.** *Steve Madge and Phil McGowan, with Guy M. Kirwan.* Frank Lambert
- **The birds of North Korea. Non-Passeriformes.** *T. Tomek* and **The birds of North Korea. Passeriformes.** *T. Tomek.* Will Duckworth

Letter from the Chairman

Nigel Collar

The birder's notebook

In Mark Cocker's *Birders: tales of a tribe* there is a passage about Richard Grimmett's notebooks. Richard was the first OBC Chairman, and I have had the pleasure—and a little personal pain—of being in the field with him and witnessing him pause to pencil notes and sketches in a little pocket notebook at each interesting sighting in the day's course. The pain, of course, comes from my own complete inability to keep any such birdwatching notes—I cannot draw, keep forgetting all the names of the feathers on the folded wing, can never work out comparative sizes, and in any case seem to have the greatest difficulty in simply *seeing* whatever it is my illustrious companion is taking diligent notes on.

A different kind of pained pleasure came to me this summer when I collected some of the late Derek Holmes's notebooks from his sister, for delivery to the library at the Natural History Museum in Tring. Derek, who spent time in Africa, Pakistan and Thailand before he settled in Indonesia, was a meticulous recorder all his life. Here, taken entirely at random, is an entry in one of the many clip-folders he filled:

> 7/12/69 Tebrau By stream on Tebrau estate, in rubber and cultivation, with flowerpeckers, etc. It seems almost sacrilege even to mention such a bird, said to be a rare bird of jungle, in such a locality, but I find it difficult to record a bird seen briefly, of flycatcher size, with blue throat sharply demarcated from rufous breast–abdomen, under any other heading!

The heading is 'Malaysian Blue Flycatcher *Muscicapa turcosa*'—was he right or was he wrong? The notebooks are full of such descriptions, hesitant identifications, and considered speculation, much or all of it done when no fieldguides were at hand to help him to a quick decision. They go right back to his days as a schoolboy, and they reveal a totally scrupulous dedication to the truth.

These kinds of document are, of course, principally for private reference. To some extent their value diminishes over time, as others find the same species and the same ID features; but in another dimension their value increases, as future generations of researchers look for changes in bird populations in particular areas, and turn for evidence to private notebooks held in libraries. It occurs to me, too, that as the Asian avifauna is gradually (or sometimes abruptly) 'unlumped', and more and more subspecies are judged to be species instead (Pamela Rasmussen has something like 60 splits up her sleeve in her forthcoming India guide), many 'new' species are going to emerge into the light with precious little published information about them. I suspect that many birders will prove to have notes on them—calls, habits, habitat, abundance—and it may be that the Bulletin would make a good forum for the pooling of such information as it becomes needed.

The Bali bomb

I write this on Australia's national day of mourning following the terrorist bomb explosion on Bali on 12 October. Suddenly foreigners are being warned by their governments to steer clear of various countries in Asia—Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and so on. What the impact will be on the behaviour of birdwatchers and bird tour companies I cannot yet grasp, but the signs are discouraging. Nevertheless, I trust that western birders will continue to go to Asia and experience its wonders and hospitality, behaving with sensitivity and courtesy wherever they go, and creating that special good fellowship that comes with the shared pursuit of happiness through birds.

Annual General Meeting, London, Saturday 30 November 2002

The 18th OBC Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday 30 November at the Zoological Gardens meeting rooms. Doors open at 11h00, the first talk will commence at 11h45 and will be followed by the AGM at 12h30. There is the usual full programme of speakers, books, CDs and videos from WildSounds and refreshments throughout the day. The full programme was sent out with the AGM papers in October.

Club News

incorporating the Gurney's Pitta Campaign update

Recent Club meetings and events

British Bird Watching Fair, August 2002

The Club had a very high profile again at the 2002 Bird Fair. The main fund raising effort was in aid of Sumatran lowland rainforest and Council decided to fund a project under the overall umbrella of the Sumatran rainforest theme. WCS-Indonesia Programme was seeking funding for a project to 'Evaluate the Status and Threats to Hornbills across the southern Sumatra Landscape' and it was agreed that OBC would fund raise for this project during the Fair.

On the stand itself, the prize draw ticket sales team had yet another Leica APO 77 Televid scope to tempt the visitors. The Club's thanks go to Leica once again for their generous support. Special thanks go to volunteers Freda Eden (our evergreen star ticket sales person), Richard Eden, Richard Bosanquet, Vicki Harley and Tony Rush who stood up to the rainforest-like humidity very well! Despite these conditions and thanks to our persistence up to the end of the event on Sunday afternoon sales finally reached our second-best ever total, only beaten by the exceptional 2000 figure, when the Gurney's Pitta signature petition played a significant part. Sales were boosted by the new 'Rhinoceros Hornbill' T-shirt and pin badge. Council member Steve Rowland negotiated 'Hornbill Ale' to replace 'Gurney's Pitta Bitter' and the promotion was again a great success. A cheque for £100 for the 'Helping Hornbills Project' was again forthcoming from John Pryke and Alastair Chapman of Prykeman, the BBWF caterers. Hornbill Ale beer mats were also used as a Club promotion in the refreshment tent. The panel game 'Call My Ruff' was staged by the OBC for the second year and was again very popular with visitors. Council's thanks go again to Steve Rowland for organising and chairing the show.

OBC speakers were again prominent at the Fair in the shape of the Chairman, who delivered a lecture on 'Hornbills – flagships of the rainforest' and Tim Loseby, who spoke on 'Bharatpur'. Thanks go to both for maintaining the Club's profile in this important way. The final OBC triumph came in the 'Bird Brain of Britain' competition. For the first time, the competitors represented the regional bird clubs: ABC, NBC, OBC and OSME. Richard Thomas represented the Club and finally won the competition after being runner up when representing BirdLife in the past. Well done Richard!

The Conservation Cup five-a-side football competition is now a well established favourite with regulars at the fair, but although 'Forktail Palace' did finally progress from the preliminary stages, albeit with some difficulty, they sadly still failed to make a major impact despite several new signings. Nonetheless it was great to see them score at the right end! Thanks again to Marcus Kohler and his assistants on the day – Phil Benstead and Mike Edgecombe – for organising the event. This year again saw a new name on the trophy with WildWings taking the spoils and WWT as runners up. Well 'Forktails', there's always next year if Marcus still has the legs, and conservation did benefit to the tune of some £800, thanks to the fantastic support from WildSounds and O.U.P.

The Club's thanks go to Zeiss who provide bursaries to help OBC and many of the other small conservation societies attending the Fair. We are very grateful for this continuing support which enables the Club to have a double stand at a reasonable cost.

OBC Summer Meeting 2002

This year's OBC summer meeting was held on August 25 at Cley. For the first year in living memory we were without Dick Filby for most of the day. Dick was recovering from the night before when he had celebrated his U.K. wedding reception! Congratulations Dick! This occasioned some breaks with tradition, with Steve Rowland taking over as compere and Mike Edgecombe, calling on hitherto unsuspected culinary talents, taking over as the new 'curry king'. All those who smelt and tasted his Thai-style curries will agree that the Club has a new star. Great stuff Mike, we're looking forward to 2003! Three attractive and varied talks were presented to the audience of about 80 members and friends. Nigel Collar spoke again on 'Hornbills', and he was followed by a fascinating account of the 'Bird & Marine Life of the Maldives' by Charles Anderson. The final talk was a spectacular and wide-ranging presentation on 'Nepal' by Suchit Basnet and Tika

Giri. At the end of the programme, the OBC 2002 Mega Prize Draw was made.

The winner of the superb Leica APO Televid 77 telescope donated by Leica, was OBC member Eric Hollemann. The second prize, a £200 voucher donated by WildSounds, was also won by a Club member. Once again Council would like to take the opportunity to thank all the donors of the prizes which make the draw such a success: Leica, Lynx Edicions, Christopher Helm/A & C Black, New Holland, OUP, and WildSounds.

During the break between the main programme and the BBQ, participants were again challenged by Mike Edgecombe's third OBC Video Quiz. The experts achieved high scores but the mix of species presented meant there were old friends that everyone could recognise.

For the third year running, the day ended with a barbecue, about 35 members and friends stayed on even though the rain started on cue again, just as Dick turned up to set up the BBQ and put on the food!

Thanks to the speakers, to Duncan Macdonald and the WildSounds team for the books and tapes on sale, Mike Edgecombe for the quiz, and the ladies who helped with the refreshments throughout the day.

Council hopes to see even more members and friends when we return to Cley in 2003.

OBC Tour to Tibet 2002

For many, birding in the remote Tibetan plateau seems an unattainable goal. Western ornithologists seldom visited the area until the last decade, so it was with a fair degree of excitement that ten OBC members embarked on the first OBC bird tour to the Chinese province of Qinghai. The tour was expertly led by Jesper Hornskov and was a complete ornithological delight, with such magical birds as Tibetan Bunting, Mongolian Ground-jay, White Eared Pheasant, White-tailed Rubythroat and Pallas's Gull, to name but a few. Add to that eight species of redstart, six of the seven world species of snowfinch and 11 different rosefinches and you begin to have a picture of just how magical a trip it was. After three weeks of living at high altitude and birding from dawn to dusk the team returned home weary but content. The club is indebted to Jesper for all his hard work. The tour also raised, by contributions from all participants, just under £1,000 for the OBC conservation fund.

Mike and Simon Colenutt will give a multimedia talk on the tour at the 2002 OBC AGM.

It is hoped to repeat this tour in 2003 from 20 July to 6 August. For details contact the club promotions officer, Mike Edgecombe, either through the club address or by E-mail m.edgecombe@virgin.net

The Club and the Internet

The Club E-mail address may be used to notify the Club of address changes, membership renewals, sales orders and general enquiries. Contributions for Club publications may also be submitted in this way. Please ensure that contributions and attachments sent to the Club are virus-free. If you have any doubts about the system you use, please mail a hard copy as back up. Mail sent to the Club E-mail address: mail@orientalbirdclub.org is forwarded to the appropriate Council member for attention.

The Club website at http://www.orientalbirdclub.org contains information of interest to members and prospective members alike. Members are requested to draw it to the attention of potential new members who want further information about the Club. A new addition to the site is the 'OBC Gallery' which showcases a small selection of photographic images of birds of the Region to give visitors to the site a taste of oriental avifauna. Thanks once again go to Alan Wilkinson for his work in maintaining the site.

Members are also reminded about *OrientalBirding*, the E-mail discussion group for all those interested in oriental birds, and *OrientalBirdingPix*, a sister E-mail discussion group for those interested in posting, viewing and discussing photographs of oriental birds. Please sign up via the OBC website.

Both groups are managed by Council member Krys Kazmierczak with assistance from a team of volunteers including Club members Des Allan and Alan Wilkinson. Lively discussions take place on many topics and they are a good way to get help and have questions answered, often by experts. Please do remember, however, that the opinions expressed are those of the writers, not those of OBC Council and are not representative of Club policy. Both groups are free, why not give them a try?

The OBC Image Database is an ambitious new project launched during August 2002, which aims to collect and make available on the web photographic images of all the birds of the Oriental region. This project is the brainchild of Krys Kazmierczak, who has received an enormous level of support from Vijay Cavale and Tom Tarrant in sorting, preparing and loading photographs. In addition, Vijay has sponsored the development and hosting of the Database through his own website. Council is very grateful to all concerned for their help with the project and to

Vijay for his generous sponsorship. The Image Database can be reached via the OBC web pages.

Announcements

Tim Lawrence

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Tim Lawrence, a founding member of OBC. Tim, who was only 47, died in hospital on the 4 October 2002 after a short illness. We offer our deepest sympathies to his wife, Nittaya and to his parents and family. Anyone wishing to make a donation in his memory should send monies to the Club, for the Gurney's Pitta fund.

Bharatpur Centenary Celebrations

At the time of writing there is no further indication when the 100th birthday celebrations of the world famous Keoladeo Ghana National Park, Bharatpur, will be held. It is still hoped that the Club will be represented at the event. Further information will be published on the Club website and *OrientalBirding* as soon as the timetable is known. If any members are interested in visiting Bharatpur at the time of the celebrations, please will they contact the Secretary, preferably by E-mail. Full information will then be sent to them.

Membership Renewal for 2003

If your subscription is due for renewal on 1 January 2003, and you do not pay by bankers order, a renewal form was sent out with the AGM papers. Please renew right away! Early renewal helps the administration greatly and saves money. Publications for members who renew late are mailed out individually at substantial extra cost to the Club, and make extra work for the Membership Secretary.

OBC Sales

An update sales leaflet was circulated with the 2002 AGM papers.

Trip Reports

New reports available include 'Wallacea' and 'Yunnan', both by Jon Hornbuckle, 'Vietnam' by Sam Woods and Andy Adcock, and 'Sichuan' by Peter Hopkin. The Club's thanks go to all those who donate their reports to us. All profits from the sale of trip reports go to the Conservation Fund.

T-shirt and sweatshirt designs

The new OBC Rhinoceros Hornbill T-shirt was launched at the 2002 BBWF and was an immediate success. It is based on an original painting by Martin Woodcock and marks a departure from previous Club designs, being printed on an olive-green shirt. The Club name and logo are carried on the left sleeve. It features on the Club website and a small colour advertisement can be seen on page 49 of this issue. Profits are earmarked for the 'Helping Sumatran Hornbills' project. The full range of OBC sales items is displayed on the Club website.

Thanks Again!

The thanks of Council go to all the members who visited the Club stand – either at BBWF or the Cley meeting – and picked up their copy of *Forktail* 18. Around 250 copies were distributed, saving £400 on mailing cost. Look out for *Forktail* 19 at the 2003 Bird Fair.

Advertise in the OBC Bulletin

Council would like to thank all the organisations advertising regularly in the OBC Bulletin. Advertisements help to offset the cost of production and the benefit to the Club from this is significant.

The standard Bulletin advertisement rates [black & white] are: full page £135; half page £85; quarter page £60. Colour advertisements are available at extra cost. Please contact Richard Thomas via the normal Club address or E-mail.

Gurney's Pitta Campaign update

General and political

The political changes reported in Bulletin 35 are still slowly being put into effect.

The Royal Forestry Department (RFD) is indeed being restructured but the position of the Director–General, following the attempt to replace him, now appears to be more secure than before as a 'permanent' secretary within the new ministry reported in Bulletin 35.

Not surprisingly, arguments are continuing about the Thai 'land bill' also reported last time. As noted, the final amendments were not regarded as favourable by the leaders of the rural communities and they are continuing the arguments and making protests.

The recent announcement by the RSPB of their involvement in support of Gurney's Pitta is the only major development to report. We are very pleased to reproduce the announcement in full:

'The RSPB is working with the Government of Thailand and Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BCST–BirdLife in Thailand) on a plan to save the Gurney's Pitta, a critically endangered bird found in just a few patches of lowland forest in southern Thailand. The RSPB will provide funding and conservation advice to BCST for the next five years. BCST will be working with the Thai government and other organisations to restore the pittas' habitat. There are fewer than 15 pairs left in the wild'.

Members of OBC Council have been aware of the negotiations involving the RSPB for many months but due to their delicate nature it had been agreed with RSPB International Division that no comments would be made pending the outcome. Chairman Nigel Collar and Secretary Brian Sykes met with RSPB several times during the course of negotiations. It is excellent news that a successful conclusion has been reached and we look forward to the development of this exciting new initiative.

Developments at site

The OBC campaign made significant progress in May/June 2002 when the long-awaited OBC/ South Bangkok Rotary sponsored , WCS planned and executed Ranger Training Course was held at the Wildlife Sanctuary headquarters. The 35 trainees attending were drawn from the Wildlife Sanctuary staff, and RFD Krabi Province staff responsible for the protection of National Reserve Forest in the area. In addition, a number of senior officers from RFD Krabi Province and the Krabi Province Border Patrol Police attended and took the opportunity to exchange ideas. The project received the full support of the newly appointed Krabi Province Governor who attended the opening ceremony. It is suggested that members with access to the OBC website might like to read the article 'Holding Hands for Gurney's Pitta' which gives a longer appreciation of the Training Course. The course as the article indicates was well-received by the participants and a huge additional benefit was the possibility of future co-operation and joint patrolling by the three units noted above. These units are responsible for forest protection in the critical areas. The new proposals would lead to focused patrolling of key areas on a 'round the clock' basis. Each patrol team would include staff from each unit to ensure that the patrol has full authority to 'stop and search' at any location when suspicious activies are discovered. The new proposal is subject to budgetary difficulties as present operations do not include work outside 'normal hours'. In order to ensure that a start may be made and in the hope that it will be possible to demonstrate the benefits of this type of operation, the OBC has agreed to contribute the shortfall for a five-month period over the 2002–2003 dry season.

This is particularly important as the 2001–2002 dry season proved to be very prolonged and the number of encroachment incidents was much higher than in either of the two previous years. Most of the worst incidents were outside the Wildlife Sanctuary, but 60% of the Gurney's Pitta territories also lie in the National Reserve Forest adjacent to the sanctuary.

Fruitful discussions were also held with BCST at this time and resulted in the agreement for BCST to organise a programme of environmental awareness training for local school students in the area. This project, funded by the OBC 'Save Gurney's Pitta' fund, is now underway and will be concluded during 2003.

OBC and WCS have also been instrumental in trying to forge links between the RFD Krabi Province officers interested in re-afforestation of plots of land which have been reclaimed from encroachers, and members of the 'FORRU' project team based at Chiang Mai University. At this stage it is too soon to be clear how things may develop, but OBC is prepared to help with funding pilot projects should RFD Krabi province and FORRU agree on the way to go forward. This is potentially a very exciting development.

Although no assessment has been made of the Gurney's Pitta population during the 2002 breeding season there are no indications of any major changes. Yotin Meekaeo carried out a six month long 'Human Use Survey' this year on the same basis as in 2001 and it is hoped to continue this work as it should prove a useful way of monitoring the effectiveness of the protective measures taken in the future. The Club's thanks go to Yotin for his contribution!

The campaign owes a big 'thank you' to WCS Thailand staff, particularly programme director Tony Lynam, Petch Manopawitr and Klos boonthawer for organising the Training Course, and to Uthai Treesucon for his expert input to the course. The enthusiastic and practical support by OBC member Alec Napier continues to give the campaign a major boost, not only thanks to the funding he has provided through his link with Bangkok South Rotary but also through his many ideas and not least the way in which he has widened the support base for the project in Thailand through the Rotary organisation.

As a final indication of the impact of the Training Course in the area, members can find also on the website: a transcript of a message received by WCS from the Krabi Province Deputy Governor which recognises its contribution. The challenge now is to maintain the momentum.

Future updates

Information is posted on the Club website and on *OrientalBirding* from time to time. In the event of a far-reaching development, steps would be taken to inform Club members.

Conservation Fund

Compiled by Phil Benstead, with contributions from Mike Crosby, Mark Gurney, Geoff Hilton, Carol Inskipp and Phil McGowan.

More change of personnel here on the Committee, this time we bid farewell to Andy Clements, who has been handling projects from Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh for at least the last five years. A big thank-you to you Andy. We have also welcomed back our one-time Chairman, Marcus Kohler, who just cannot stay away. Marcus will be handling projects originating from Sri Lanka. Looking at my team of Conservation Officers I am confident that the OBC has a full and diverse Conservation Committee, each member bringing different skills and knowledge to the table – things have never been better.

Thanks once again to all those who support the conservation activities of the club by buying raffle tickets and purchasing OBC goods at the British Birdwatching Fair and other meetings.

GRANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Study of Lesser Adjutant, Royal Chitwan National Park, Nepal

An OBC Small Grant of £500 has been awarded to Nabin Gyawali to fully fund his study of the globally threatened species, Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus*, in Royal Chitwan National Park in south-central Nepal. The stork was once fairly common in the country's lowlands, but it is now mainly restricted to isolated pockets in protected areas. Chitwan is thought to be an important site for Lesser Adjutant, although no systematic survey of the species has so far been carried out in the park. Nabin aims to assess the population status of Lesser Adjutant in Chitwan, study its habitat preferences, assess threats to the stork and make detailed management recommendations to ensure its long-term survival in the park.

The impact of human activities on the wintering waterfowl at Shengjing Lake National Nature Reserve, Anhui, China

A Small Grant has been awarded to Jiang Hongxing for a study of the effects of human activities on wintering waterbirds in Shengjing Lake National Nature Reserve. This large lake in the lower Yangtze basin supports hundreds of wintering White-naped Cranes *Grus vipio*, Hooded Cranes *Grus monacha* and Oriental Storks *Ciconia boyciana*, and is an important stop-over site for Siberian Cranes *Grus leucogeranus*. Like many other lakes in the Yangtze basin, it is threatened by reclamation and changes to the hydrology of the region, and the wintering waterbirds are being affected by recent changes in fishing methods and the development of livestock husbandry, as well as illegal hunting. The project aims to investigate the numbers of waterbirds and their distribution within the nature reserve in both the early winter and late winter periods, and analyse how the birds and their habitats are being affected by the various human activities. The results will provide the basis for a preliminary management plan for the reserve, which will aim to integrate local economic development with the conservation of the waterbirds and their habitats.

A bird survey of Dempo Mountain, Sumatra, Indonesia

A Small Grant has been awarded to Muhammad Iqbal and his team to undertake a bird survey on Dempo Mountain, Sumatra. The site is an Important Bird Area and is within the montane Sumatra Endemic Bird Area. The project aims to survey the mountain, concentrating on Sumatran endemics (Sumatran Cochoa *Cochoa beccarii* occurs) and will attempt to educate the local villagers about the importance of the site and its avifauna. There have been no recent surveys of this mountain.

Mapping historical distribution of heronries in India

S. Subramanya continues his work on documenting the whereabouts and history of large waterbird colonies in the Indian subcontinent and has received another Small Grant. This project looks to extract data attached to the egg collections of 26 colonially nesting species held at the British Museum (Tring). The details from the card indexes of 574 egg clutches will be recorded and this information will form part of a wider literature search into the subject of the historical distribution of these birds.

Survey for Javanese Lapwing at Muara Cimanuk, Indramayu, West Java, Indonesia

A Small Grant has been awarded to the Ornithological Division of the Biological Student Association of Padjadjaran University to undertake a search for the Javanese Lapwing *Vanellus macropterus* at Muara Cimanuk. The site, on the north coast of Java, has been identified using remote-sensing as a possible hiding place for this enigmatic species which has not been reliably reported since 1940 and may already be extinct.

Environmental awareness programme for primary level pupils in state high schools, Yangon City, Myanmar

Nyein Chan and team have been awarded a Small Grant to undertake a conservation awareness programme covering 158 schools in Yangon City, Myanmar. They will distribute posters and colouring books and will be offering a 30-minute lesson on 'Birds and the Environment' to each school. It is hoped that the programme will encouarge an enthusiasm and respect for birds, which will in turn reduce the killing and persecution of wild birds.

Bird Survey of Leshe Volcano Tank, Myanmar

A Small Grant has been awarded to Myint Shwe to undertake a bird survey of the Leshe Volcano Tank in Myanmar to ascertain whether any important species occur there. It is thought that the site may be important for Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* and the surrounding area certainly supports some of the species endemic to Myanmar.

A bird survey of Mount Simpang and Tilu Nature Reserves (SILU), West Java, Indonesia

A Small Grant has been awarded to Made Wedana Adi Putra (KONUS) to survey the SILU reserve. SILU is the largest nature reserve left in the region and has an important function in supplying water to lowland areas. Although little information exists on its biodiversity richness, Birdlife International-Indonesia Programme has listed the area as an Important Bird Area in the Java and Bali region. The reserve is known to hold 24 restricted-range birds, of which three species are considered Vulnerable (Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus*, Javan Cochoa *Cochoa azurea* and White-breasted Babbler *Stachyris grammiceps*) and one species is Endangered – Javan Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus bartelsi*. The reserve also has three endemic primates, including the Critically Endangered Javan Gibbon *Hylobates moloch*.

Uvs Nuur lake surveys, Uvs Aimag, Mongolia

A Small Grant has been awarded to M. Anhbayar for a survey of Uvs Nuur, a huge salt lake in western Mongolia. Several threatened species were recorded there during preliminary surveys, including Swan Goose *Anser cygnoides*, White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*, White-naped Crane *Grus vipio* and Relict Gull *Larus relictus*, as well as tens of thousands of other waterbirds. However, information on the status of these birds at the lake is very incomplete, and this project will help to establish a baseline for future monitoring. Uvs Nuur is already popular with Mongolian and foreign tourists, and the improved information on the lakes' birds will help with the development and management of eco-tourism there.

Community conservation on Mount Slamet, Java, Indonesia

A Small Grant has been awarded to Adi Widyanto of The Caring Community for Mt Slamet (KOMPLEET), who are involved in a much larger community-based sustainable management plan for the area. It is an important site that holds many Javan endemics, including the Endangered Javan Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus bartelsi*, Near-threatened White-breasted Babbler *Stachyris grammiceps*, Rufous-tailed Fantail *Rhipidura phoenicura* and White-flanked Sunbird *Aethopyga eximia*, as well as the Critically Endangered Javan Gibbon *Hylobates moloch*. Mt Slamet is one of the largest natural forest patches remaining on Java, and as such is one of the most important areas for birds on the island. The project team will spend five weeks assessing bird species richness the mountain's forests between November and December 2002. In addition, training in watching and identifying birds will be given to a variety of local clubs and societies for young people that are concerned with the environment, such as high schools and nature clubs.

Bird survey work in the Dieng Mountains, Java, Indonesia

The Dieng Mountains of Central Java lie in one of the most densely populated parts of the country. Nonetheless, the mountains hold one of the largest forest blocks (around 255 km^2) on Java and are a priority Important Bird Area. They holds crucial populations of the Endangered Javan Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus bartelsi* and the Critically Endangered Javan Gibbon *Hylobates moloch*, which may be amongst the last populations with long-term viability prospects. Thomas Oni Veriasa of Yayasan Pteropus Vampyrus Indonesia (the Indonesian Society for Wildlife Conservation) has been awarded a Small Grant for avifaunal work in these mountains. There are three project objectives:

- to collect information on avifaunal diversity at selected sites and identify major habitat types;
- to record information on pressures on the forest and its birds, such as encroachment by humans and the use of wildlife;
- to train a number of NGOs, nature clubs and scouts in bird surveys.

The results of this work will then feed into the proposed Collaborative Management Plan of the Dieng Mountains. As Mr Veriasa is also a member of a broad partnership (including government officials, community organisations and NGOs) that has been established to support the conservation management of the Dieng Mountains, the grant is supporting a discrete activity, the results of which can be used immediately in management planning.

[Funded by the OBC Tibet Tour 2002]

Conservation awareness amongst students living around Royal Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve, Nepal

A grant of £750 has been awarded for a one-year programme to create conservation awareness amongst students living around Royal Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve in far western Nepal. This will be carried out by Bijay Tamang, who will be assisted by a teacher from the nearby town of Mahendranagar and by Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN). The project aims to organise a training workshop on bird conservation, a birdwatching camp for local students and to publish a resource handbook in order to create an interest in birds and their conservation amongst students. Raising conservation awareness is especially important at Suklaphanta because it supports important populations of several globally threatened bird species including Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis*, Swamp Francolin *Francolinus gularis*, Hodgson's Bushchat *Saxicola insignis* and Bristled Grassbird *Chaetornis striatus*. Very little, if any, conservation awareness work has been carried out around the reserve to date.

Ecological studies on White-rumped Vulture in Rampur valley, Palpa District, Nepal

Ramji Gautam, who will be assisted by Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN), has been awarded a grant of £500 to carry out ecological studies for one year on the White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* – a globally threatened species – in the Rampur valley, central Nepal. The species is declining throughout the country, but there is still a good population in the Rampur valley and this provides a good opportunity for study. The results of this project will complement those already carried out in Koshi in the far east of Nepal, and Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve in the far west of the country. The specific aims of the project are to estimate the population and breeding success of the species in the Rampur valley, to study the general ecology of the species and to record the proportion of birds exhibiting 'head-drooping' behaviour, if any. The project also aims to collect data on the extent of pesticide use in the valley, and to assess threats and recommend measures for vulture conservation at this site.

Conservation education and monitoring in Singhalila National Park, Darjeeling, India

OBC
Tibet Tour
2002

A Conservation Awareness Small Grant has been awarded to Sarala Khaling, to conduct an education and monitoring programme in Singhalila National Park, Darjeeling, India.

Singhalila is a small (ca.100km^2) national park, holding excellent temperate and subalpine forests at mid-altitudes. Over 500 species of bird have been recorded from the site, including the globally threatened Chestnut-breasted Partridge *Arborophila mandellii*, and the Near-threatened Satyr Tragopan *Tragopan satyra*.

The education work will take place in two villages, one within the core area of the park, and the other in the buffer zone. The residents are heavily dependent on forest products for their livelihoods. Separate environmental education workshops will be held for adults and children in each village, and workshops on basic monitoring of forest biodiversity will also be held. The project complements a larger rural development programme in the area, organised by the World Pheasant Association's South Asia Office.

[Funded by the OBC Tibet Tour 2002]

A preliminary survey of status, distribution, habitat preferences and conservation of the White-naped Tit in South India

Oriental
Bird
Club

The White-naped Tit *Parus nuchalis* is a globally Vulnerable Indian endemic, with a curious distribution. There are two disjunct populations, one in north-west India, and a second in southern India (Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu). The north-western population was the subject of a recent project – funded by the OBC – but the southern population has not been studied. It is generally thought to inhabit dry thorn-scrub forest, but anecdotal records suggest occupation of a wider range of habitats.

A Small Grant, funded by the WildSounds Conservation Cup has been awarded to Thejaswi Shivanand, to investigate the status and distribution of the southern population. Numerous sites throughout the region for which there are historic records of the species will be visited to establish broad distribution patterns. This will be followed up with more detailed, quantitative work at sites holding high densities of the species. The project should deliver much new information on the status and habitat preference of the species; it is also to be hoped that a few new localities for the species will be found. Armed with this information, the project team hope to use the species as a flagship for the vanishing scrub jungles of southern India.

[Funded by the Conservation Cup]

CONSERVATION FUND REPORTS OF GRANT-ASSISTED WORK

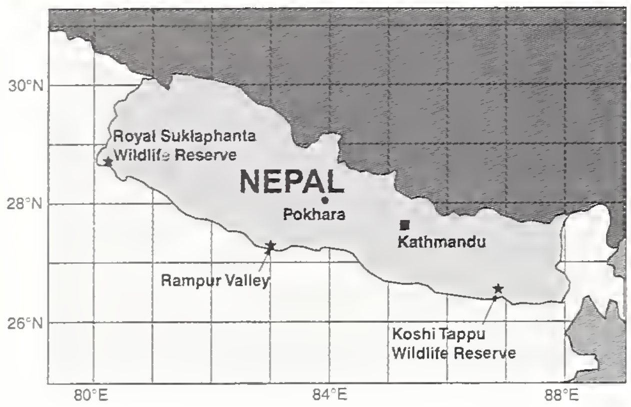
Study of vultures in western lowland Nepal

An OBC Small Grant funded a study of vultures, mainly White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* and Slender-billed Vulture *G. tenuirostris* in western lowland Nepal from January to May 2002. In recent years both White-rumped and Slender-billed Vultures have been declining in many areas of Nepal.

The main aims of this study were to assess the population of both species, to estimate the food availability, and to quantify the mortality rate and breeding success in Royal Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve in west Nepal.

A preliminary survey was made throughout the reserve except for the proposed buffer zone and extension area. All possible important habitats were searched for vultures and their nests. Nesting trees were identified, marked and given a number. All nests were regularly monitored every month and recorded until mid-May. The number of nests and breeding success were noted using data sheets. The reserve's grasslands (phantas) and nearby villages were visited on foot to look for carcasses but the interiors of large phantas were not covered because of security problems and wild elephants. Regular visits were also made to roosting colonies. The ground below nesting and roosting colonies was carefully searched for dead vultures.

In addition, a pilot study of vultures was made in Royal Bardia National Park and Khairapur area. Vultures and nests seen en-route from Chitwan (in central Nepal) west to Bardia and Mahendranagar (near Suklaphanta Reserve) were recorded and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Royal Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve
NEPAL
Pokhara
Kathmandu
Rampur Valley
Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve

the status of nests located along the route was noted where possible.

A total of 19 vulture nests was found in Suklaphanta Reserve: nine belonged to White-rumped Vultures, seven to Slender-billed and three were unknown. Only three of these nests were successful: two White-rumped and one Slender-billed. Other nests were deserted at various stages of the nest-building and incubation process. This high rate of nest abandonment, which increased from late January, is alarming. No clear causes could be traced and only one Slender-billed Vulture chick fledged this year in Suklaphanta, which is surprising considering their population size in the area. No evidence was found of a food shortage in the reserve.

A total of seven dead vultures was recorded during the study period in different nesting localities. Out of these, five were White-rumped (three adult, one sub-adult and one juvenile) and two adult Slender-billed Vultures. The number of dead vultures may well have been under-recorded as it was not possible to survey the phantas properly (see above).

The population of vultures at Suklaphanta is still reasonably good. The highest numbers found during the study period were 37 White-rumped Vultures (28 adults, five subadults and four juveniles) on 2 January in two flocks, and 22 Slender-billed Vultures (15 adults, four subadults and three juveniles) on 4 January in three flocks. The numbers of vultures dropped sharply by the end of May, however. More than 65 vultures (mainly White-rumped) were seen at Sunbal, between Narayangarh (Chitwan) and Mahendranagar in January. The vulture populations in Bardia National Park and in Khairapur area are also still quite good. During the Bardia pilot survey, three nests (two of Slender-billed and one of White-rumped) were found. As many as 11 nests of White-rumped Vulture and a total of 40 individuals were recorded in Nayabeli, Bardia (Amrit Karki pers. comm.). In Khairapur area, eight nests (six of White-rumped and two unknown) and 13 Slender-billed Vultures were seen.

Group discussions with villagers, local leaders, schoolteachers and students were organised in Jhilmila and Radhapur primary schools. The discussions focussed on the status of vultures in the past and present, and on possible causes of their crash, the significant role of vultures in maintaining a healthy environment and the public's role in their conservation.

J. B. Giri has written three articles on the alarming state of vultures in Nepal in the *Gorkhapatra National Nepali Daily*, *The Himalayan Times* (national daily English version) and in *Munal* (quarterly Nepali newsletter of Bird Conservation Nepal). These articles highlighted the conservation issues and aimed to create and promote conservation awareness amongst the general public.

We would like to strongly recommend that there is an urgent need to set up a captive-breeding centre in Suklaphanta reserve considering there is still a reasonably good population there and the alarming and rapid rate of vulture declines in Nepal. A long term study on vultures should be started in Nepal. Previously surveyed areas should be monitored and potential new areas explored. Some other areas of research should be examined, for instance changes associated with livestock farming, peoples' attitude to vultures, changes in agricultural practices, cattle mortality rate, the number of cattle exported to India from Nepal and climate change.

Royal Suklaphanta is a prime habitat for both White-rumped and Slender-billed Vultures. The whole reserve, especially the main phantas, should be managed properly to protect the vultures. Since they prefer nesting on mature trees, such trees should be conserved outside and inside protected areas. The illegal export of cattle to India should be banned. Different articles in Nepali should be published frequently, so that the general public can have a greater opportunity to understand the vultures, their environmental role and the threats to them in Nepal.

Jeet Bahadur Giri and Som G.C.
P.O. Box 12465, Lazimpat, Kathmandu, Nepal

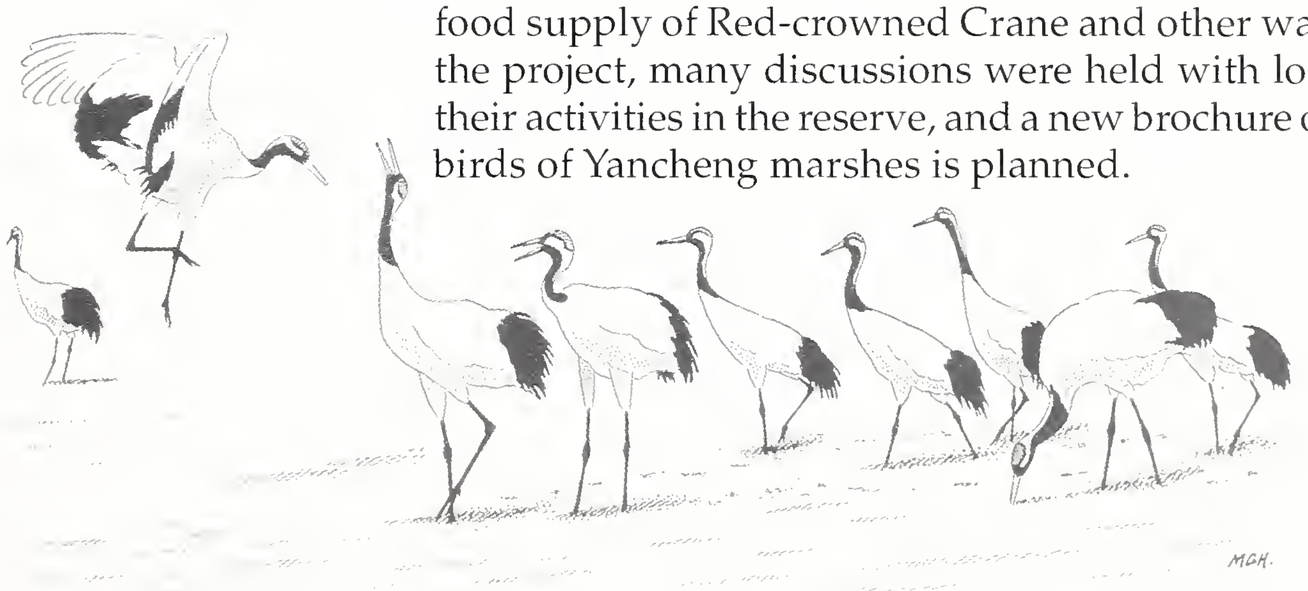
The conservation of threatened birds and their habitats at Yancheng marshes, Jiangsu, China

Yancheng Nature Reserve includes 582 kms of the coastline of southern Jiangsu province, and consists mainly of intertidal mudflats, saltpans and fishponds. The reserve was established for its wintering flock of Red-crowned Cranes *Grus japonensis*, but is also home to almost 20 globally Threatened species. This study, funded by an OBC Small Grant, was conducted from January–December 2001. It aimed to collect information on the populations of the threatened birds and their habitat preferences, and to develop ways to increase local awareness of the birds and the need to protect their habitats.

Regular surveys were conducted at Sheyang Saltworks, an exceptionally important site for waterbirds, and visits were made to many other parts of the reserve during the year. Fourteen threatened species were recorded during the survey, including Oriental Stork *Ciconia boyciana* (53 wintering birds), Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* (23), Swan Goose *Anser cygnoides* (638), Baikal Teal *Anas formosa* (132), Baer's Pochard *Aythya baeri* (414), Scaly-sided Merganser *Mergus squamatus* (22), Red-crowned Crane (939), Saunders's Gull *Larus saundersi* (534) and Relict Gull *L. relictus* (15).

Information collected during discussions with 146 hunting families resulted in an estimate that over 60,000 waterbirds of 10 species were killed in the central section of the reserve during 2001, mainly for sale at local markets. The use of guns is completely prohibited within the reserve, so the hunters use poisoned baits and one Red-crowned Crane was found poisoned in February 2001, and three in February 2002.

In addition, habitat is being lost as local people reclaim tidal land to grow rice and cotton, and new embankments are being constructed for aquaculture. Reclamation of tidal areas and intensive harvesting of crabs and shellfish may be affecting the food supply of Red-crowned Crane and other waterbirds. During the project, many discussions were held with local people about their activities in the reserve, and a new brochure on the threatened birds of Yancheng marshes is planned.



Red-crowned Cranes *Grus japonensis* by Michael Hodgson (Courtesy of Birdquest)

A study of White-browed Nuthatch, Myanmar

White-browed Nuthatch *Sitta victoriae* by Craig Robson

Thet Zaw Naing studied the ecology of White-browed Nuthatch *Sitta victoriae*, a globally Endangered species known only from Mount Victoria (Natmatuang) in Myanmar. The site was visited in November, March, April, and July and up to 17 nuthatches were found in each month.

The birds were recorded from 2,450–3,005 m in pine forest with oak, rhododendron and a few other hardwood trees. Oaks and rhododendrons were favoured by the birds, with pines accounting for only 5% of sightings. The birds usually fed in the outer branches of the middle canopy of the trees, where their favoured feeding method was gleaning insects from epiphytic plants and lichens.

Three nests were found, and this appears to be the first time that they have been documented. They were at 4 m, 6 m, and 10 m, in natural holes in the inner branches or trunks of living trees. Two were in oaks, and one was in a rhododendron. The holes were not plastered with mud. Three assumed family groups, each with two juveniles, were subsequently seen in April.

Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler *Xiphirhynchus superciliaris* by Seb Buckton

Another 178 bird species were recorded, including four globally Vulnerable species, seven Near-threatened species, and seven new to West Myanmar. These included a male Mrs Hume's Pheasant *Syrmaticus humiae*, at least three Blyth's Tragopans *Tragopan blythii*, flocks of up to 15 Grey-sided Thrushes *Turdus feae*, nine Black-breasted Thrushes *T. dissimilis*, several Red-tailed Laughingthrushes *Garrulax milnei*, and five Slender-billed Scimitar Babblers *Xiphirhynchus superciliaris*.

The main threats to the nuthatch and other birds come from hunting and burning in the National Park. The study recommends raising awareness of the effects of these activities and greater control of tree removal and illegal trapping.

Thet Zaw Naing
Myanmar Bird and Nature Society,
69 Myaynigone Zay Street, Sanchuang T/S,
Yangon 11111, Myanmar

'Eastern' Sarus Cranes in Rakhine, Myanmar

Tin Nwe Latt investigated the distribution and population structure of the 'eastern' Sarus Crane *Grus antigone sharpii* in the Ayeyarwady Delta of Myanmar.

She estimated the population here to be about 300 individuals. These were mostly encountered as pairs, but 12 family parties were found. Larger groups, of up to 67 birds, appeared at roost sites during the summer season, and in the day during the rainy season. The daytime congregations appeared to be social groupings, not feeding flocks, and they engaged in displays and courtship.

Much of the area is under agriculture with rice being the main crop. The paddyfields and wet grasslands are important areas for the cranes, but the larger gatherings seemed to be focused on more natural wetlands. The distribution and social structure was determined by the availability of water and food, and by human disturbance, and by the weather. For example, the cranes moved to natural shallow wetlands following storms in mid-May.

This study suggests that agricultural areas are important for the Sarus Crane in this region of Myanmar, and that the farmers will need to be involved in any conservation programmes for the species.

Tin Nwe Latt

Little-known Oriental Bird

Aethopyga sunbirds on the Philippines

The sunbird genus *Aethopyga* consists of seventeen species, occurring from India to Wallacea, eight of which occur in the Philippines, seven being endemic to those islands, which is the area of their greatest radiation. However, some have a very restricted distribution, with three species only occurring at a small number of localities on Mindanao. Their tongue structure suggests that they are most closely related to the spiderhunters, *Arachnothera*, another genus confined to the Oriental region. The majority are brightly coloured, particularly the males, and most have yellow or yellowish rumps in both sexes.

1. Shelley's Sunbird *Aethopyga shelleyi*

This previously contained the six subspecies now separated as Lovely Sunbird *A. bella*.[1] This is a fairly common species occurring at forest edge, in scrub, thickets, secondary growth and cultivation up to 2,000 m on Balabac, Busuanga, Culion and Palawan. The combination of dark red on sides of head, neck and upper back, with yellow and grey on underparts separates the male of this and the next species from all other species of sympatric sunbird; olive-green upperparts and greyish underparts distinguish the females of both species whereas the female Purple-throated Sunbird *Leptocoma sperata* is more yellow below, with a dark stripe through the eye, the much larger female Copper-throated Sunbird *L. calcostetha* has a grey hood, paler on throat, whitish supercilium and much yellow on underparts, and the much larger female Plain-throated Sunbird *Anthreptes malacensis* has a greyish head, with pale grey or yellow area around eye, and grey or yellow throat.

2. Lovely Sunbird *Aethopyga bella*

Six subspecies, previously included in *A. shelleyi*[1] occur in similar habitat to that species on Mindanao, Samar, Leyte, Dinagat, Siargao, Cebu, Masbate, Panay, Ticao, Luzon, Mindoro, Polillo, Marinduque, Lubang, Jolo and Tawi-Tawi. Only likely to be confused with previous species, but the two are allopatric. For distinguishing characters see account above.

3. Grey-hooded Sunbird *Aethopyga primigenius*

Two subspecies are known from eight localities on Mindanao, occurring in forest and at forest edge above 1,000 m. It is apparently common where it occurs,[2] but considered Near-threatened[3] because of the paucity of information. Greyish hood, yellow rump, white tips to tail feathers, and white and yellow underparts distinguish it from all sympatric sunbirds.

4. Apo Sunbird *Aethopyga boltoni*

Three subspecies are known from five localities on Mindanao, usually in forest above 1,500 m, but has been recorded down to 823 m. It can be fairly common,[2] but is considered Near-threatened[3] due to its very small total range. Male distinguished from male Lina's Sunbird *A. linaraborae* by grey forehead, not green, secondaries and wing-coverts edged golden olive-green, rather than metallic blue and green, tail glossed greenish, rather then violet-blue, and female by greyish, not greenish, throat; male Lovely Sunbird *A. bella* has sides of head, neck and upper back dark red, and female is greyish-yellow below; larger female Olive-backed Sunbird *Cinnyris jugularis* is entirely yellow below, and has a yellow supercilium. Both Apo and Lina's Sunbirds have white tips to tail feathers in both sexes.

5. Lina's Sunbird *Aethopyga linaraborae*

Recently described,[4] this species is fairly common in montane forest above 975 m at three localities on Mindanao. BirdLife International[3] consider it Near-threatened due to its small total range. See previous species for distinguishing features.

6. Flaming Sunbird *Aethopyga flagrans*

Four subspecies occur uncommonly in forest, at forest edge and in secondary growth up to 1,350 m on Luzon, Cantanduanes, Guimaras, Panay and Negros. Male could only be confused with larger male Olive-backed Sunbird, but Flaming Sunbird has an orange patch or stripe on gorget, lacks white tips to tail feathers, and the subspecies on Guimaras and Panay has blood-red nape to mantle, whereas the female lacks yellow supercilium, and is much less yellow below, and its virtually unpatterned face further distinguishes it from the much larger female Plain-throated Sunbird *Anthreptes malacensis*, Purple-throated Sunbird *Leptocoma sperata*, and the much larger Copper-throated Sunbird *L. calcostetha*.

7. Metallic-winged Sunbird *Aethopyga pulcherrima*

Three subspecies occur commonly in forest, at forest edge, in secondary growth and cultivation, generally mid-mountain forest up to 1,500 m, occasionally in lowlands of Mindanao, and to 2,000 m on Luzon.[2] Also occurs on Bohol, Basilan, Dinagat, Leyte, Samar and Biliran. The male has variable amounts of green iridescence on wings, yellow rump, no white spots on tail, and underparts mostly yellow and greyish, with orange-red patch on breast; female is olive-green above, with yellow rump, and pale olive-grey underparts. These characters distinguish this species from all sympatric sunbirds.

Crimson Sunbird Aethopyga siparaja

One subspecies of this wide-ranging non-endemic sunbird is common in forest, scrub, secondary growth and cultivation up to 1,000 m on Cebu, Marinduque, Negros, Panay, Sibuyan, Tablas and perhaps Leyte. Its distribution is from India, through South-East Asia to south China, the Philippines, the Greater Sundas and Sulawesi. The distribution of red and black above and below, and yellow on rump and uppertail-coverts on the male, distinguish it from all sympatric sunbirds; the female is equally distinctive in its pattern of olive, olive-green and red. Not illustrated.

For more detailed information on these species consult Kennedy *et al.*[2] and Cheke & Mann,[5] where these illustrations are reproduced.

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Clive F. Mann
123 Hartswood Road, London, W12 9NG, U.K.

Captions for plate on opposite page

1a Shelley's Sunbird *Aethopyga shelleyi* adult male;

1b Shelley's Sunbird *Aethopyga shelleyi* adult female.

2 Lovely Sunbird *Aethopyga bella* adult male.

3a Grey-hooded Sunbird *Aethopyga primigenius* adult male (nominate);

3b Grey-hooded Sunbird *Aethopyga primigenius* adult male (*diuatae*; Mt Hilong-Hilong)

4a Apo Sunbird *Aethopyga boltoni* adult male;

4b Apo Sunbird *Aethopyga boltoni* adult female.

5a Lina's Sunbird *Aethopyga linaraborae* adult male;

5b Lina's Sunbird *Aethopyga linaraborae* adult female.

6a Flaming Sunbird *Aethopyga flagrans* adult male (nominate);

6b Flaming Sunbird *Aethopyga flagrans* adult female (nominate);

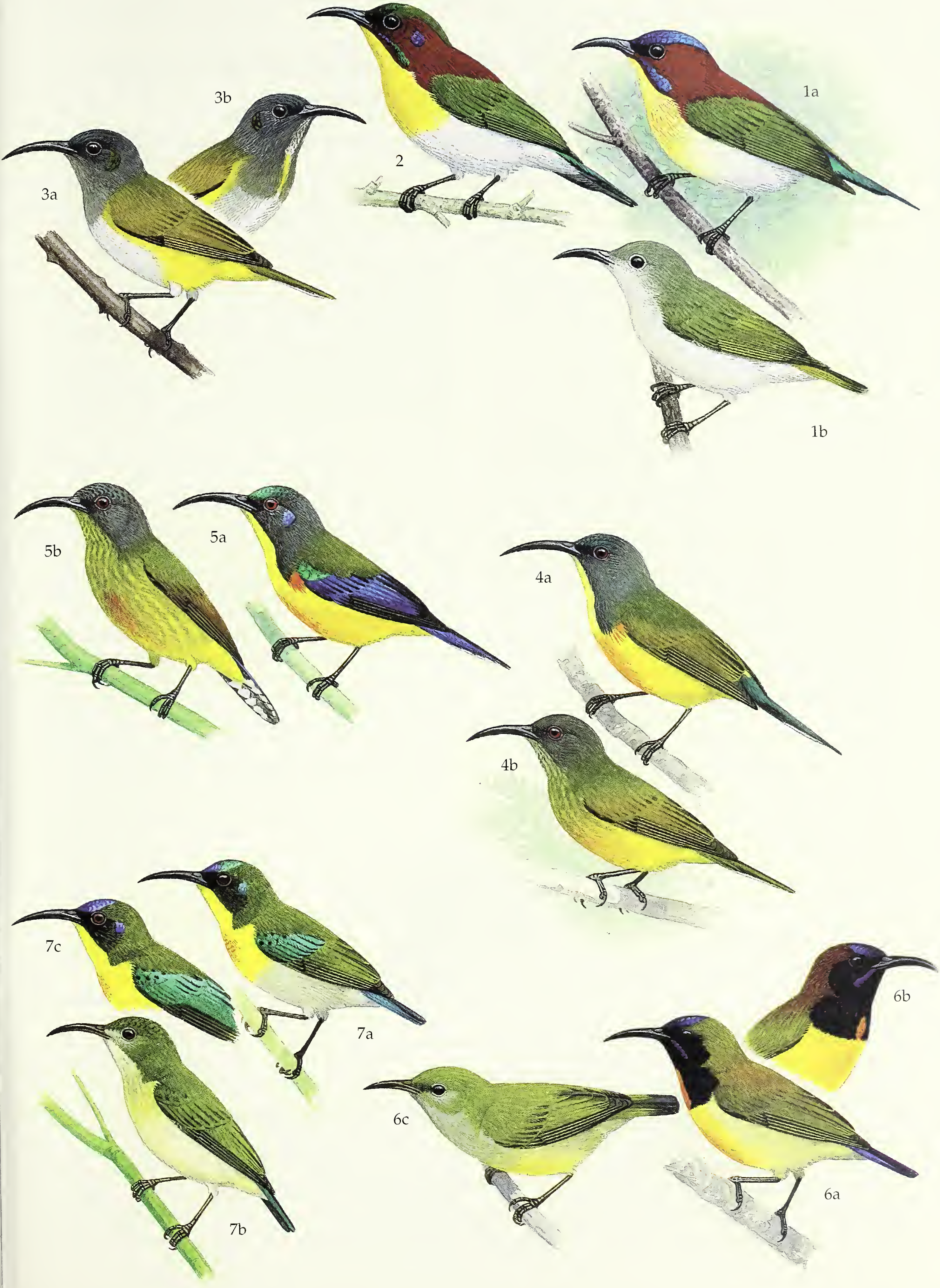
6c Flaming Sunbird *Aethopyga flagrans* adult male (*guimarasensis*; Giumaras and Panay).

7a Metallic-winged Sunbird *Aethopyga pulcherrima* adult male (nominate);

7b Metallic-winged Sunbird *Aethopyga pulcherrima* adult female (nominate);

7c Metallic-winged Sunbird *Aethopyga pulcherrima* adult male (*jefferyi*; Luzon).

Painting by Richard Allen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An expedition to Damar Island, south-west Maluku, Indonesia

Shaped like a dinosaur's head, with a steaming fumarole emitting discrete clouds of sulphur through a hypothetical nostril, the island of Damar has lain in wait for birders for over 100 years.

That is, until recent work in August 2001 by BirdLife International to rediscover the Damar Flycatcher *Ficedula henrici* (see OBC Bulletin 34, p38).

Damar, like many islands in eastern Indonesia, is remote – more than 100 km to the nearest similarly sized islands of Romang and Babar. It is one of a string of volcanic islands starting with Java in the west and ending with the Banda Islands, south of Ambon (See Fig. 1). Damar is only about 198 km^2; however it has a distinctive avifauna with its single endemic, the Damar Flycatcher *Ficedula henrici* and two endemic subspecies, Rufous-sided Gerygone *Gerygone dorsalis kuehnii* and Golden Whistler *Pachycephala pectoralis dammeriana*. Fifteen restricted-range species have also been recorded, including the near-threatened Blue-streaked Lory *Eos reticulata* (perhaps introduced from the Tanimbar Islands), Green-cheeked Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx rufomerus* (a south-west islands, endemic), Orange-sided Thrush *Zoothera peronii* (a Timor-group endemic) and Cinnamon-collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus australasia* (widespread in the Lesser Sundas). Prior to their rediscovery in 2001, the Damar Flycatcher was first and last recorded in 1898 and the Green-cheeked Bronze Cuckoo (endemic to Damar, Romang, Kisar, Leti, Moa and Babar) in 1902. Damar is perhaps also the easiest place to see the other restricted-range species listed above. Combine this with extensive and scenic forest, coastal landscapes, and two spectacularly intact small islands to the south teeming with turtles, extensive fringing reef and Beach Thick-knees, Damar offers much for guests during a 7–10 day visit.

Damar is, however, desperately undeveloped and has no electricity, no telephones, cars, motorbikes, hotels or *losmen* – though hot running water is available from volcanic springs! Its isolation has maintained a particularly strong culture with tight social control managed by village heads. A total of 5,000 people live in seven villages, most of whom rely on the cash sale of coconuts and cloves together with subsistence crops (banana, cassava, chilli, tomato and papaya) and fishing for their livelihoods. Local transportation involves walking (2–3 h) or chartering motor boats (*Johnson's*) to other villages (30–90 min), which are all along the coast. Damar is best visited between July and October when the

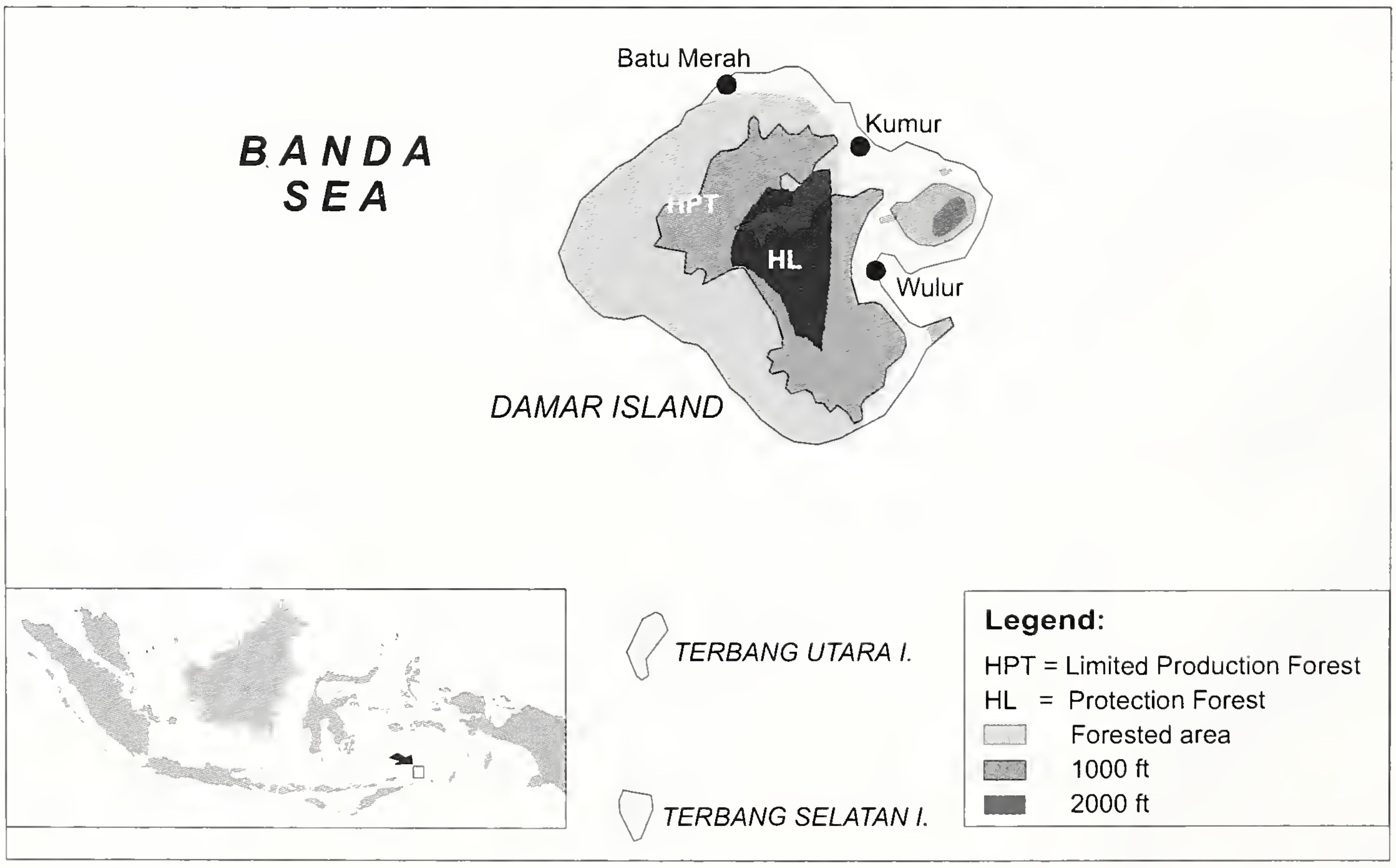

Figure 1. Location of Damar Island, Indonesia

seas are calmer (especially September) and likelihood of rain lower. There are two separate local languages with the villages of Wulur through to Kumur having different local names for birds compared to the two westernmost villages of Batumerah and Kwai. *Manu* is the word for bird in the Wulur language.

Access and accommodation

Getting to Damar is difficult. Damar is accessible by public transport from Ambon and Saumlaki (Tanimbar Islands) and with greater difficulty from Kupang via Kisar Island (contact author for details). The most comfortable option would be to charter a yacht from Bali at about $US 1,500 per person/week. Access is perhaps easiest from Ambon, however this needs to be weighed against the ongoing civil unrest in this area (1998–present). About every 20 days a *kapal perintis* ship, either the *Iliana* or *Mentari 2* (but not both) departs Ambon; on a route including Damar as the first port of call after about 26 h of travel (400 km). The ship is owned by *PT Pelayauan Mentari Sejati Perkasa Ambon*. Tickets cost only *c.* $US 2; however it is much more comfortable to arrange a cabin and bed ($US 10–15/night per bed). From Saumlaki, Tanimbar, the same ships are available at the other end of their route (ticket $US 3–4, bed as above), but travel to Damar takes 5–6 days via the islands of Babar, Sermata, Moa, Leti, Kisar, Wetar and Romang. Depending on your perspective, this is either wasted time or an opportunity to see some seabirds and get a look at some very remote and poorly known islands – many without bird records for more than 100 years! From Kupang, West Timor, the ship *Iramuar* travels past the coast of Timor stopping a couple of times on Wetar, then on to Kisar (after c.48 h), where it will be necessary to disembark and wait for a boat continuing on to Damar. The *Iramuar* continues on to the Tanimbar Islands.

Wulur area

The village of Wulur is the largest on the island (c.1,000 people) and all major ships stop in the Solat Bay between Wulur and Kehli making it the best base for birding on Damar. Stay with the *kepala desa* or village head – Sigrandus Romode (until the year 2006) who can assist with arranging guides and other logistical aspects. Giving $US 2–3 per person/night for the accommodation and food will make any village stay more friendly and comfortable. Although there is much secondary forest and interesting mangroves and sago swamp at the mouth of the bay, it is best to head straight to the primary semi-evergreen forest about 2 km south-west of the village (a one-hour walk) (ask to go to Yan Lutruwowan's garden). This can be done as a day walk, or it is easy to arrange to camp in the garden, which is adjacent to primary forest.

After leaving Wulur, the White-tufted Honeyeater *Lichmera squamata* (known locally as *Sunusopa*) is the most abundant species, using all habitat including the canopy of mangroves, coconut trees and in shrubs. The Rufous-sided Gerygone *Gerygone dorsalis* (*Lapitis*) is also very common and particularly confiding when foraging in grass or low shrubs. Other common birds in the coastal woodland and mangroves near Air Panas include Pacific Reef Egret *Egretta sacra* (*Sulit*), Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus* (*Manu apruru* – the name given for all raptors), Variable Goshawk *Accipiter novaehollandiae*, Spotted Kestrel *Falco moluccensis*, Blue-tailed Imperial Pigeon *Ducula concinna* (*Walur/pombo*), Pink-headed Imperial Pigeon *D. rosacea* (also *Walur*), Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica* (*Imuan/pau pau*), Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris* (*Aratilu*), Black-faced Cuckooshrike *Coracina novaehollandiae*, White-bellied Whistler *Pachycephala leucogastra*, Northern Fantail *Rhipidura rufiventris* (*Loi loi papa*), Rufous Fantail *Rhipidura rufifrons* (*Loi loi*) and Ashy-bellied White-eye *Zosterops citrinellus* (*Manu malar*). As you begin the gradual climb from Air Panas Spectacled Monarch *Monarcha trivirgatus* will likely be seen in secondary woodland along streams. In banana and vegetable gardens Green-cheeked Bronze Cuckoo will be calling constantly but getting good views will be more difficult.

Within Yan's garden the surrounding forest is a cacophony of sounds dominated by the abundant, small-island specialist Blue-tailed Imperial Pigeon's *urrauw* call, uttered continuously through the day. The density of this pigeon reaches 20–70 individuals/ha, and it can be observed feeding on nutmeg fruits, the dominant forest tree, from July to September along with another abundant frugivore, the Black-backed Fruit Dove *Ptilinopus cinctus*. However, Pink-headed Imperial Pigeon and Rose-crowned Fruit Dove (*Towo towo*) are less confiding. The Green-cheeked Bronze Cuckoo is easily seen here as it frequently perches on stumps and logs where it gleans caterpillars and other insects from chilli bushes and the ground. Two other restricted-range species – the Cinnamon-collared Kingfisher and Orange-sided Thrush – are also relatively easy to see at the forest edge. The song of the thrush can be heard through most of the day, whereas the kingfisher calls either early morning or late afternoon (often duetting with its raucous *ch-whee* call).

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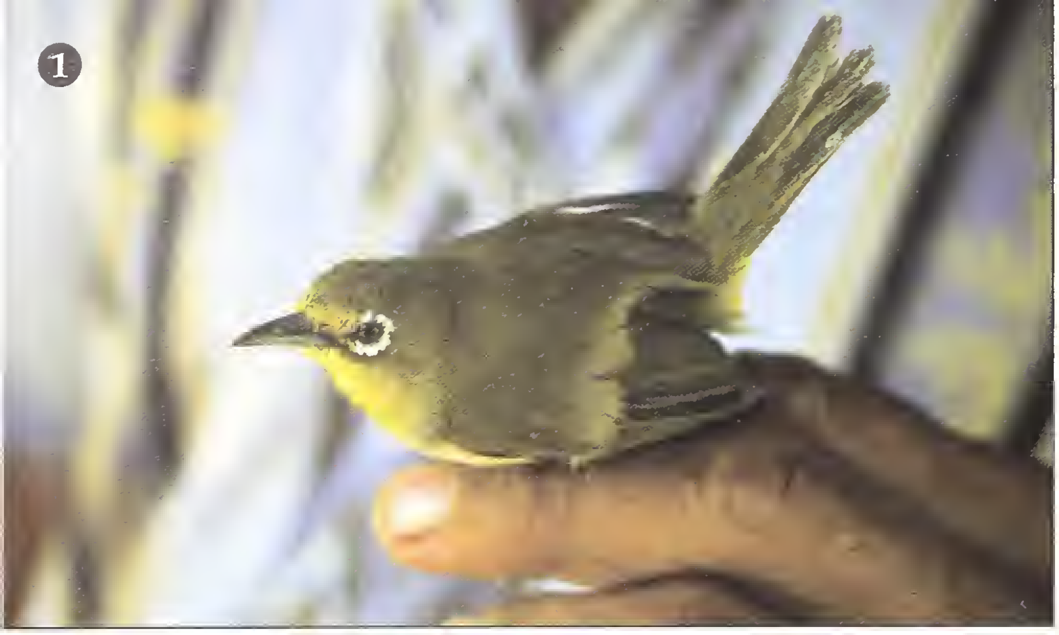

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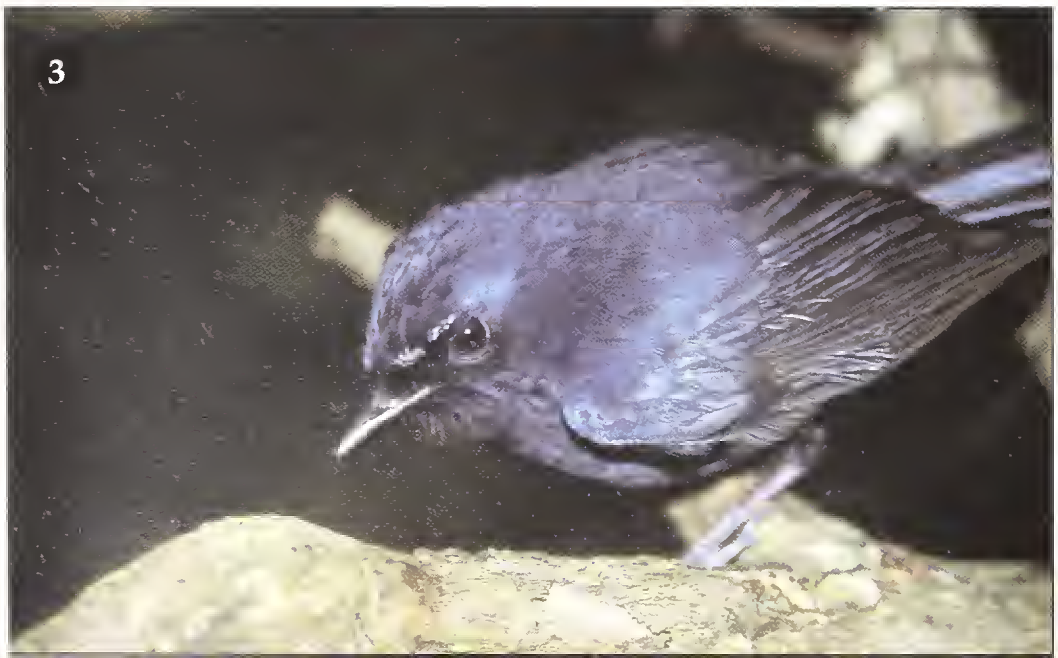

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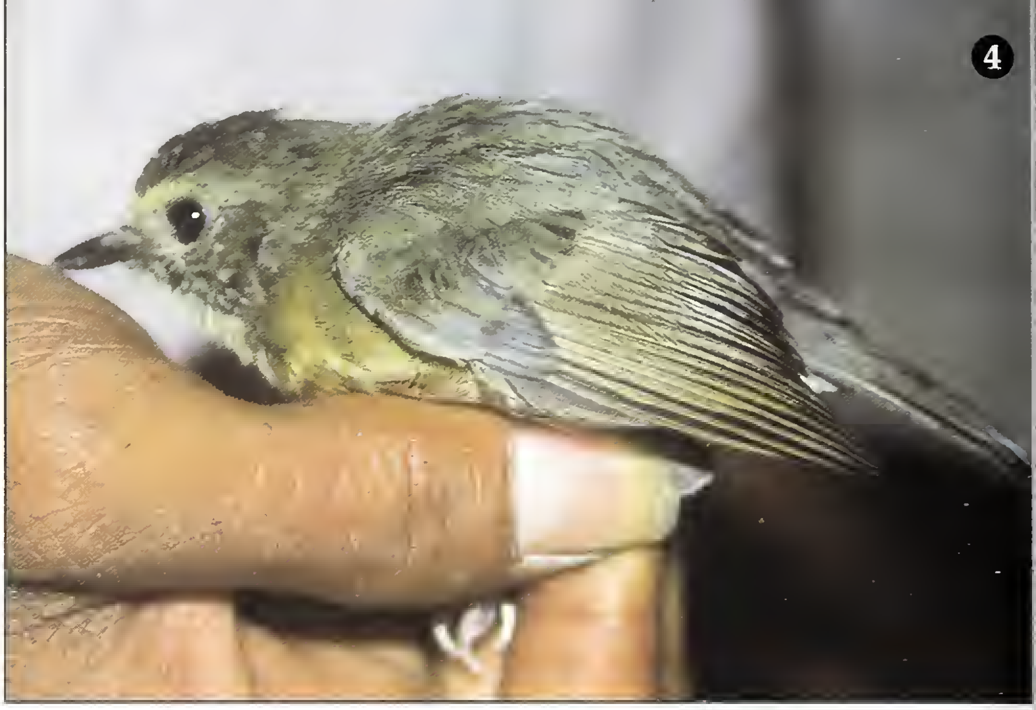

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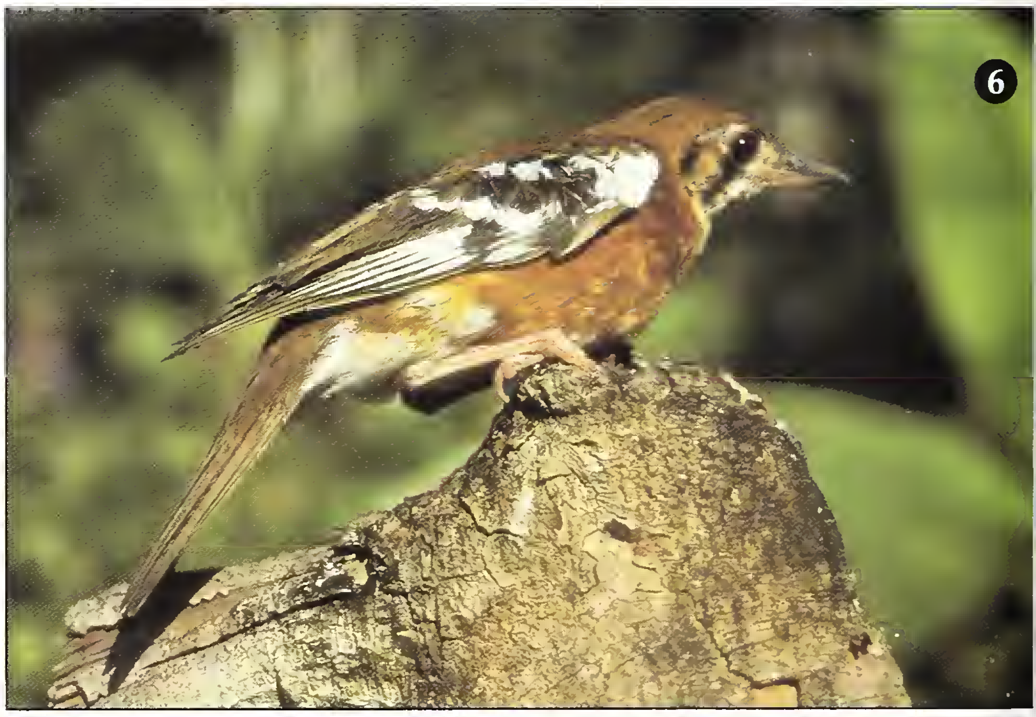

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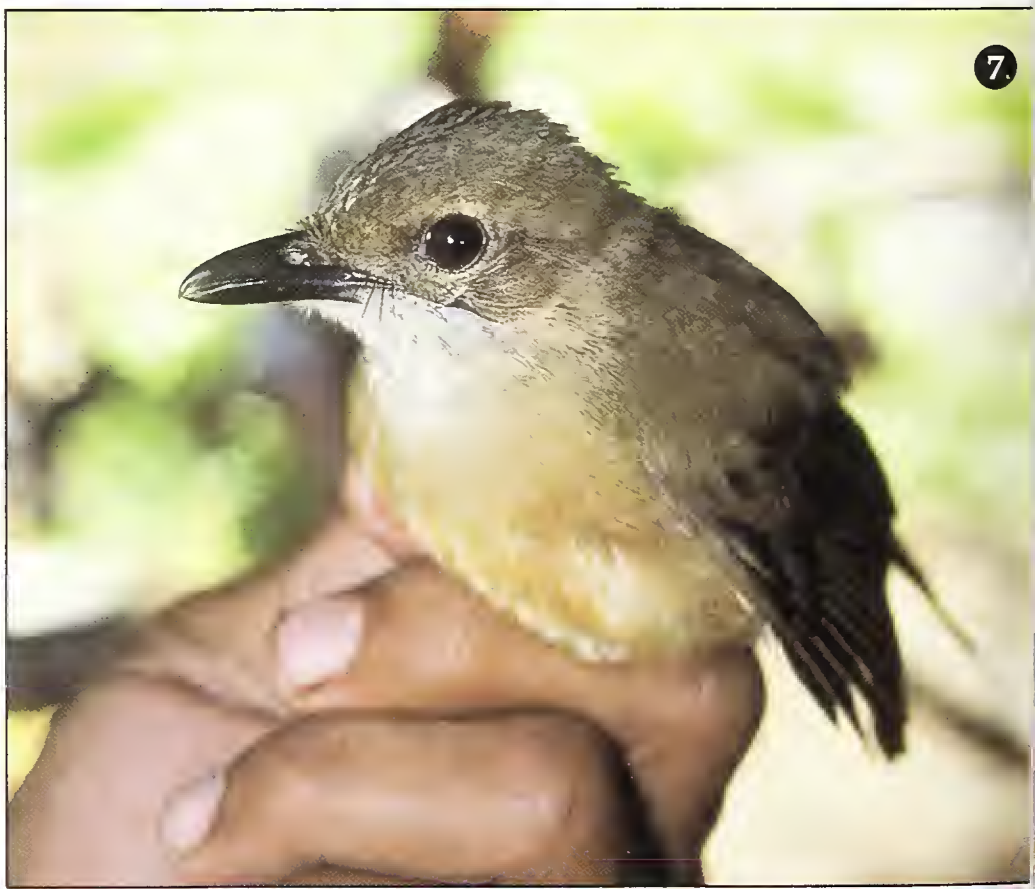

The Damar Flycatcher has been observed repeatedly along the forest edge in an area targeted for further conversion to garden plots (usually an area 50 m by 70 m is cleared). Spending time at forest edge scanning the rattan understorey and potential perches below 3 m is a good place to begin a search for this species. Damar Flycatcher is widespread here, and learning its sibilant whistle will greatly assist detection. Male birds are far easier to observe, females often present with males but skulking within dense rattan. There are no well-marked forest trails so it is necessary to follow hunter-guides who know the forest. Olive-headed Lorikeet *Trichoglossus euteles* (*Nuri hijau*) will be heard frequently flying rapidly over the canopy, the less common Blue-streaked Lory (*Asturi*, *Nuri biru* or *Nur Mer-mer*) occasionally so. While the canopy is full of forest pigeons, the understorey and subcanopy often seem empty of birds other than the ubiquitous Spectacled Monarch. However, Golden Whistlers, White-bellied Whistlers, particularly the females, are often seen skulking low in bushes or even hopping along the forest floor. Orange-sided Thrush can be observed daily, but getting a view of Elegant Pitta *Pitta elegans* amongst the dense understorey will prove more difficult. Similarly, the Metallic Pigeon *Columba vitiensis* was recorded here several times but is not confiding.

Kumur area (Kwai Protection Forest)

The easiest place to observe Damar Flycatcher during the 2001 survey was the lush semi-evergreen forest south of Kumur, but actually owned by Kwai village. Kumur is an interesting 3 h (7 km) walk from Wulur, but taking a motor boat (1 h) costing *c.* $US 2 if public transport or *c.* $US 10 if a charter, is recommended. Kumur sits on the western side of the Ayerkota River (the largest on the island) with the village of Bebar Barat 100 m away on the opposite bank. The forest is accessed by walking from the village for about 3 km (1 h), much of this along the scenic Ayerkota valley. Habitat along the valley includes some secondary forest, relatively extensive dense canegrass along the river, and coconut and clove plantations. It appears to have potential for rails, warblers and waterbirds, although apart from Pacific Reef Egret none was observed during recent work. Good views can be obtained of forest on steep slopes along the length of the valley with Brahminy Kites and flocks of frigatebirds *Fregata* spp soaring above. Blue-tailed Imperial Pigeons glide down from the ridges and Olive-headed Lorikeet is very common in flowering coconuts. Birds are under lower hunting pressure here than at Wulur (where there are many air rifles) with the Orange-footed Scrubfowl *Megapodius reinwardt* (*Hibla manu*) calling frequently from mangroves close to Kumur village.

Another garden 'lodge' is a useful base for walks to the adjacent forest where Orange-sided Thrush, Emerald Dove, Rufous-sided Gerygone, Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis* (*Manu metan*) and Green-cheeked Bronze Cuckoo are frequently observed. After entering forest Damar Flycatcher is often seen while walking along the well-marked forest trails, usually perched on lianas or saplings 1–2 m above ground, where they sit silently scanning the ground below and any bare surfaces for insects. When a prey item is observed they wing-flap in apparent excitement, then fly to ground and forage amongst litter, or glean insects from shrubs or tree trunks. Their weak whistled call can be widely heard throughout the forest. The Blue-streaked Lory (*Kasturi*) may be observed feeding on the flowers of the *Salawaku* tree or *Jambu air* (*Syzygium* sp), but more usually flying at speed over the canopy. Cinnamon-collared Kingfisher and Elegant Pitta may occasionally be seen. Barn Owl *Tyto alba* (*Uru*) screech at night from the garden camp where they hunt the abundant rats, *Rattus argentiventer*. After finishing with forest observations, more working of the modified habitats along the Ayerkota River valley is a likely area to add new species for the island.

Batumerah

Forest at Batumerah is best accessed by travelling in dugout canoes 3 km along the coast from the

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Captions for plate on opposite page

1. Ashy-bellied White-eye *Zosterops citrinellus* captured in a mistnet at Batumerah.
2. Clemens Bulurdity, PHKA (Tanimbar Island) holding a Black-backed Fruit Dove *Ptilinopus cinctus* – shot by a local hunter for food at Wulur.
3. Male Damar Flycatcher *Ficedula henrici* mistnetted above Wulur.
4. Female (or juvenile?) Damar Flycatcher *Ficedula henrici*.
5. View eastwards to Wurlali volcano.
6. Orange-banded Thrush *Zootherea peronii audacis* mistnetted at Batumerah. This was the first observation for around 90 years of this poorly known species endemic to the Lesser Sundas.
7. Female Golden Whistler *Pachcephala pectoralis* of the endemic subspecies *dammeriana*, mistnetted at Wulur.

All photos by Colin Trainor

village to the mouth of the Awehnyo River, then following the river inland for about 1 km until primary forest is reached. Man-modified coastal habitats here include mangroves, beach forest, coconut plantation and riparian forest. The Barred-necked Cuckoo Dove *Macropygia magna* was recently recorded for the first time on Damar from degraded forest near the river mouth; however this habitat contains few other birds of special interest except for White-bellied Whistler, which is common, while Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* fish along the coast. Working from a base hut in a garden plot is a good way to explore the tall semi-evergreen forest along the river. In 2001 a male and female Damar Flycatcher were observed for several hours as they moved through the camp garden foraging for insects. They regularly perched on large logs and the garden fence and flew down to the ground to feed amongst litter, on bare rocks and in chilli bushes. They typically spent 1–2 h in the gardens each morning working an area of 0.2 ha, and then moved back into the surrounding forest. Glossy Swiftlet *Collocalia esculenta* is a common aerial species in forest gaps and over gardens. The Rainbow Bee-eater *Merops ornatus* was newly recorded for Damar from this habitat.

Specialities in the Batumerah forest include Cinnamon-collared Kingfisher (likely to be observed perched above the river), Orange-sided Thrush, Elegant Pitta, Metallic Pigeon (they drink from the river in early morning), Black-banded Fruit Dove, Orange-footed Scrubfowl and perhaps Barred-necked Cuckoo Dove. Only a single individual of the latter was recorded in 2001, but it is likely to have been under-recorded. There are no marked forest trails but walking along the rocky river channel, or with a local hunter who knows the area, is a good way to explore. Unfortunately, there is active forest conversion to agricultural plots, with several being created further upstream during the survey.

Terbang Utara and Terbang Selatan

Two islets (5–6 km^2 each) located about 10 km and 15 km south of Damar are of avifaunal interest – they were birded for the first time in Sep 2001. Access is available through chartering a small motorboat from Wulur (*c.* $US 70–100 for 2–3 days). It would be possible to visit both islands in one day. Both are covered in intact tropical dry forest (10–25 m high) and coastal shrub, with extensive beaches, rocky shoreline and coral reefs. A total of 34 species was recorded on these islands, five unrecorded from the Damar mainland: migrating Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* and Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*, Beach Thick-knee *Esacus neglectus*, Little Pied Cormorant *Phalacrocorax melanoleucos* and an unconfirmed species of cuckoo (probably Pied Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx crassirostris*).

Green Turtle *Chelonia mydas* nest on the beaches at night and the nocturnal calls of the 'Turtle Bird' (*Urur Penu*) or Beach Thick-knee are a sign for local people that turtles are nesting. Beach Thick-knee is common on both islands

Table 1. Distribution of restricted-range birds at sites on Damar and associated islands.

Species	English	Residence	Forest bird	Restricted-range	Global status	Wulur	Kumur	Batu merah	Terbang utara	Terbang selatan
Ducula concinna	Blue-tailed Imperial Pigeon	R	F	RR		·	·	·		·
Ducula rosacea	Pink-headed Imperial Pigeon	R	F	RR	NT	·	·	·	·	·
Macropygia magna	Barred-necked Cuckoo Dove	R	F	RR				·		
Eos reticulata	Blue-streaked Lory	R	F	RR	NT	·	·	·		
Trichoglossus euteles	Olive-headed Lorikeet	R	?	RR		·	·	·		
Chrysococcyx rufomerus	Green-cheeked Bronze Cuckoo	R	F	RR	DD	·	·	·		
Halcyon australasia	Cinnamon-collared Kingfisher	R	F	RR	NT	·	·	·		
Coracina dispar	Kai Cicadabird	R	F	RR	NT					
Zoothera peronii	Orange-sided Thrush	R	F	RR	NT	·	·	·		
Ficedula henrici	Damar Flycatcher	R	F	RR	VU	·	·	·		
Gerygone dorsalis	Rufous-sided Gerygone	R	?	RR		·	·	·	·	·
Pachycephala pectoralis dammeriana	Golden Whistler	R	F	RR		·	·	·		
Monarcha mundus	Black-bibbed Monarch	R	F	RR	NT					
Dicaeum maugei	Red-chested Flowerpecker	R	?	RR		·	·	·		
Lichmera squamata	White-tufted Honeyeater	R	F	RR		·	·	·	·	·
Erythrura tricolor	Tricoloured Parrotfinch	R	F	RR						

Key to global status categories:
NT = Near Threatened
RR = Restricted-Range
DD = Data Deficient

(perhaps 10–30 individuals on each). It can be observed throughout the day foraging on beaches and exposed rock platforms, feeding on barnacles and molluscs. There is a roosting colony of Greater Frigatebird *Fregata minor* and Lesser Frigatebird *F. ariel* on Terbang Selatan said to sometimes number in the 1,000s (about 100 individuals in 2001). In addition, the abundance of several species is much greater here than on Damar. The Orange-footed Scrubfowl is exceptionally abundant (3–5 pairs observed per hour), as are Pink-headed Imperial Pigeon, Black-banded Fruit Dove and Rose-crowned Fruit Dove, whereas White-tufted Honeyeater was surprisingly rare.

Conservation

Damar Island lies in a global biological hotspot, the Banda Sea Islands Endemic Bird Area (EBA 165: Stattersfield *et al.* 1998). This EBA harbours 18 endemic and 41 restricted-range bird species. Damar, supporting more restricted-range birds than Sumba (an island more than 50 times larger), is of high conservation interest with its single endemic Damar Flycatcher, near-threatened Blue-streaked Lory and other globally restricted forest birds such as Orange-sided Thrush and Cinnamon-collared Kingfisher, demanding the greatest attention (see Table 1). With 70–80% (140–160 km^2) of the island still covered in semi-evergreen and dry tropical forest there appears little threat to these species in the near future. However, small-scale logging carried out by local people, and increasing forest clearance for crops to feed a slowly rising human population will continue to place low-level pressure on the forest. As on the Sangihe and Talaud Islands (after Wardill and Riley 1999), showing that birds and forest are important in their right by visiting the island and paying local guides is one way that the Damarese can see tangible benefits of their forest stewardship. Understandably they find it difficult to believe why anyone would travel thousands of kilometres to see birds on their island.

Three restricted-range species went unrecorded during the survey: Kai Cicadabird *Coracina dispar*, Black-bibbed Monarch *Monarcha mundus* and Tricolored Parrotfinch *Erythrura tricolor*. Any new information to assist our understanding of the status of these and other interesting species such as the newly reported Barred-necked Cuckoo Dove and Shining Starling *Aplonis metallica* would be useful. Research priorities for the Damar Flycatcher include a census to assess its population size and distribution, although it is now considered common and widespread in forest and under little threat of extinction.

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Colin Trainor, BirdLife International-Indonesia Programme, P.O. Box 310/Boo, Bogor, Indonesia

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SANJIV GOGOI,
RENUKA COMPLEX, ZOO ROAD TINIALI,
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Buryatia – Siberia's southernmost extremity

The autonomous Russian republic of Buryatia is located south and east of Lake Baikal, bordering the republic of Tyva to the west, the administrative districts of Irkutsk to the north-west, Chita to the east and Mongolia to the south (see Fig. 1). It covers a total area of approximately 350,000 km^2. The republic lies near the centre of the Eurasian land mass in a region climatically influenced by both the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans. Furthermore, it is on the border between the taiga forests of northern Asia and the central Asian steppe and semi-desert.

The dominant geological feature is Lake Baikal, the world's largest reservoir of fresh water and home to a variety of endemic fauna including the well known Baikal Seal *Phoca baicalica*. Many streams and rivers run into the lake and the largest of these, the Selenga, has an extensive delta comprised mainly of flooded meadows, mudflats and channels of open water. The Khamar-Daban range, with peaks up to 2,316 m, rises from the southern end of Lake Baikal and further south-east lies the edge of the Mongolian plain. The republic thus offers a variety of habitats and climates in a relatively small area and this is reflected in the diversity of bird species recorded.

Despite its richness, the avifauna of Buryatia is still relatively poorly understood. The majority of the ornithological work in the area has focused on the wetlands, particularly the Selenga Delta (see Mlíkovsky *et al.*[1] for a summary). Unfortunately most of the relevant literature has been published locally (in Russian) and is difficult to obtain outside Buryatia. Studies of the other habitats in the region have been far more limited and this fact is reflected in the comparative lack of detail in distribution maps of many species whose ranges extend over this area. There is a complete checklist of birds recorded in the republic with indications of their status[2] but little additional information is available. There is no field guide to the region other than the outdated guide to the entire former Soviet Union.[3]

The republic represents the centre of Buddhism in Russia and contains significant attractions for the non-birdwatching tourist.[4] Several airlines offer direct flights from Moscow to the capital city of Ulan-Ude, making Buryatia one of the more easily accessible regions of Siberia. Nevertheless, it has at present a relatively poor tourist infrastructure, with few hotels outside Ulan-Ude and little English spoken. Internal transportation is difficult but several very distinct areas can be reached from Ulan-Ude without too much trouble. Birdwatchers visiting the republic will naturally be interested in the Selenga Delta and we would recommend them in addition to spending some time in and around Ulan-Ude as well as going to the Baikal National Park and the steppe area towards the Mongolian border. In this article we briefly describe the habitats in these regions and give a rough overview of the typical species we recorded during a two-week visit in the latter half of June 2001.

Ulan-Ude and surroundings

Ulan-Ude (51°55′N 107°40′E, 550 m a.s.l.) is a sprawling, industrial city on the Selenga River with a population of approximately 400,000. It contains a number of attractive parks and green areas where first-time visitors can acquaint themselves with many commoner and more widespread species. A good place to start is Bogorodsky Island, a large island in the Selenga River at the edge of the city. The vegetation consists primarily of willow trees along water courses and grassy areas inhabited by Daurian Souslik *Citellus dauricus*. The area is suggestive of the steppe regions in the south of the republic,

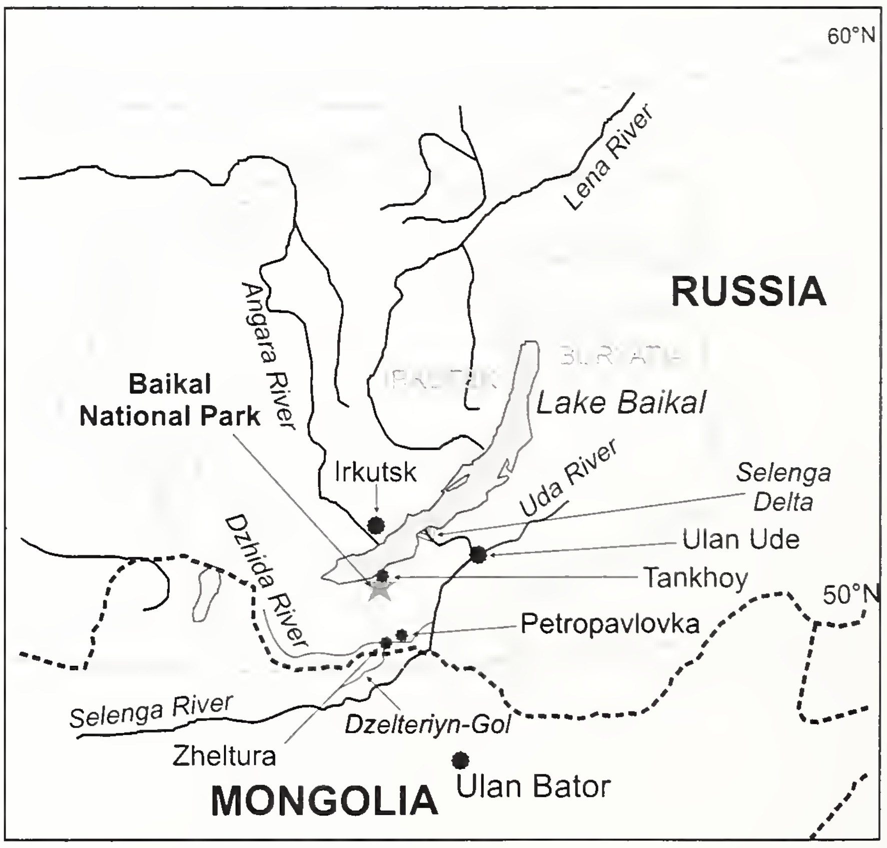

Figure 1. Map showing areas mentioned in the text

though naturally on a much smaller scale. Typical species include Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus minor*, Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope*, Marsh *Parus palustris* and Azure *P. cyanus* Tits, Azure-winged Magpie *Cyanopica cyana*, Daurian Jackdaw *Corvus dauuricus*, Long-tailed Rosefinch *Uragus sibiricus* and Yellow-breasted *Emberiza aureola* and Black-faced *E. spodocephala* Buntings. Tree Sparrows *Passer montanus* are especially common and nest in holes created by Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers. There is some suggestion that they may gradually be displacing the Azure Tits from the area (V.Ye. Yeshyeyev, pers. comm.). We also observed a female Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*, which we assigned to the race *stoliczkae*, part of the group of subspecies often split off as White-crowned Penduline Tit *Remiz coronatus*. Surprisingly, we found a pair of White-backed Woodpeckers *Dendrocopus leucotis* in the willows. This species turned out to be rather common in Buryatia and far less tied to extensive areas of primary forest than normal (*cf.* Winkler *et al.*[5]).

Ulan-Ude is surrounded by agricultural land with occasional rocky hills, which are home to species such as Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*, Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus* and Meadow Bunting *Emberiza cioides*. The agricultural areas host a number of interesting species such as Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus*, often split from Eurasian Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, Daurian Partridge *Perdix dauurica*, Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi*, Oriental Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus orientalis* and Chestnut-eared Bunting *Emberiza fucata*.

Baikal National Park

The Baikal National Park, on the southern bank of Lake Baikal, preserves a large area of taiga forest and contains a number of taiga specialities. The small village of Tankhoy (51°32′N 105°05′E) represents a good starting point for an exploration of the area. The forest around Tankhoy is dominated by conifers and contains many species typical of this habitat. More extensive patches of forest nearby – good examples can be found along the banks of the Pereyemnaya and Bol'shoy Mamay rivers – are composed primarily of birch, pine and spruce mixed with aspen and poplar. The understorey is relatively dense but occasional clearings are found, typically around moister areas. The middle elevations are dominated by spruce trees and are highly reminiscent of the Alps in central Europe, although the proportion of dead wood is significantly greater, leading to much higher numbers of woodpeckers. A trail along the bank of the Bol'shoy Mamay river provides access to some higher elevation habitats in the lower reaches of the Khamar-Daban range. Above the timberline the vegetation is rich in ferns and composite flowers, providing a dense 'carpet' with a height of about 40–50 cm.

Species recorded at lower and middle elevations include Oriental Honey-buzzard *Pernis ptilorhyncus*, Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*, White-throated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus*, Grey-headed *Picus canus*, Black *Dryocopus martius*, White-backed and Three-toed *Picoides tridactylus* Woodpeckers, White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*, Siberian Blue *Luscinia cyane* and Rufous-tailed *L. sibilans* Robins, Orange-flanked Bush Robin *Tarsiger cyanurus*, Eyebrowed *Turdus obscurus*, Siberian *Zoothera sibirica* and Scaly *Z. dauma* Thrushes, Spotted Bush Warbler *Bradypterus thoracicus*, Gray's *Locustella fasciolata*, Thick-billed *Acrocephalus aedon* and several species of *Phylloscopus* Warblers (see below), Dark-sided *Muscicapa sibirica* and Mugimaki *Ficedula mugimaki* Flycatchers, Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes* and Pine *Emberiza leucocephalos*, Yellow-browed *E. chrysophrys*, Black-faced, and Chestnut *E. rutila* Buntings. Above the timberline we found Asian House Martin *Delichon dasypus*, Red-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis ruficollis* and Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei* to be relatively common and we also saw (Siberian) Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus (collybita) tristis* and Pine Grosbeak *Pinicola enucleator*. More surprisingly, the extensive vegetation provided sufficient cover for Siberian Rubythroat and Spotted Bush Warbler and we also observed a Thick-billed Warbler at this elevation. Siberian

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Captions for plate on pages 26 and 27

1. Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope*
2. Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos*
3. Orange-flanked Bush Robin *Tarsiger cyanurus*
4. Red-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis ruficollis*
5. Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*
6. Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*
7. Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*
8. Lancolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata*
9. Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola*
10. Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*
11. Mongolian Lark *Melanocorypha mongolica* by Otto Pfister

All photos except 11 were taken in Buryatia by Tim Loseby

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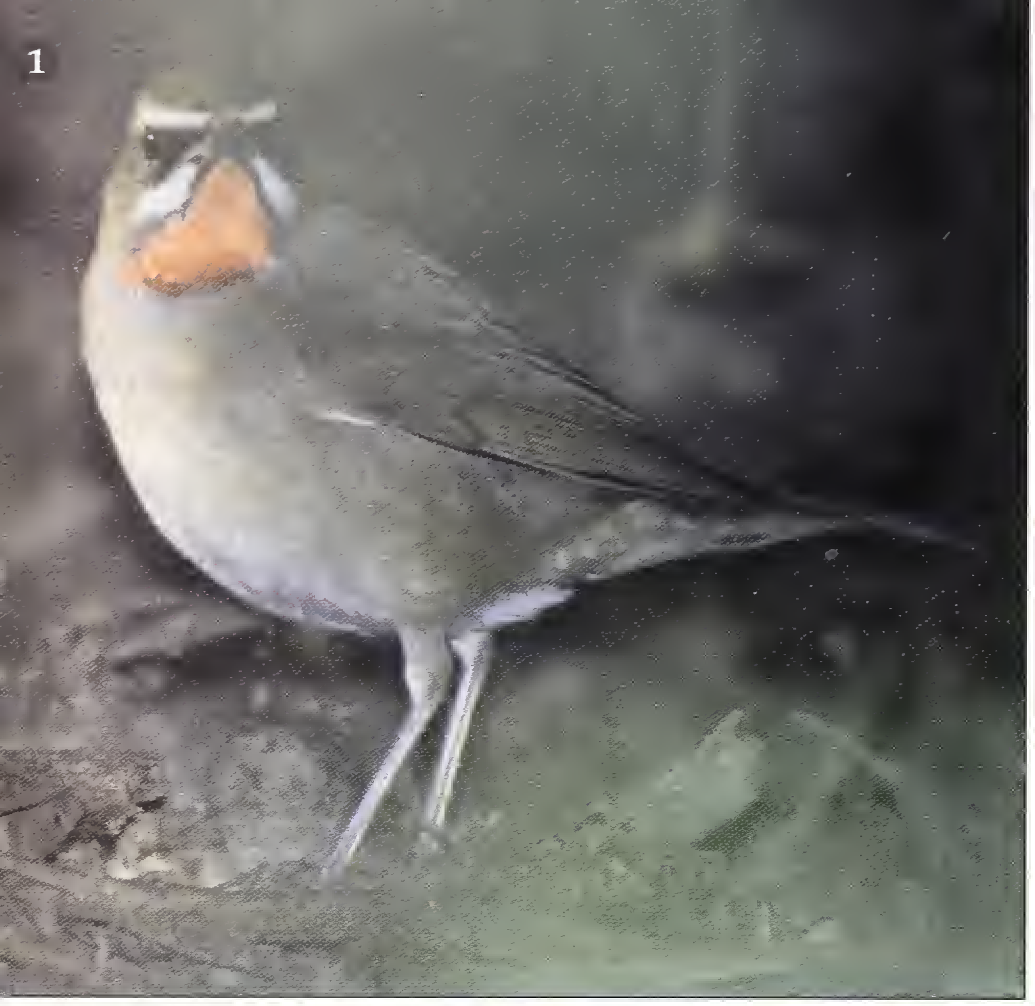

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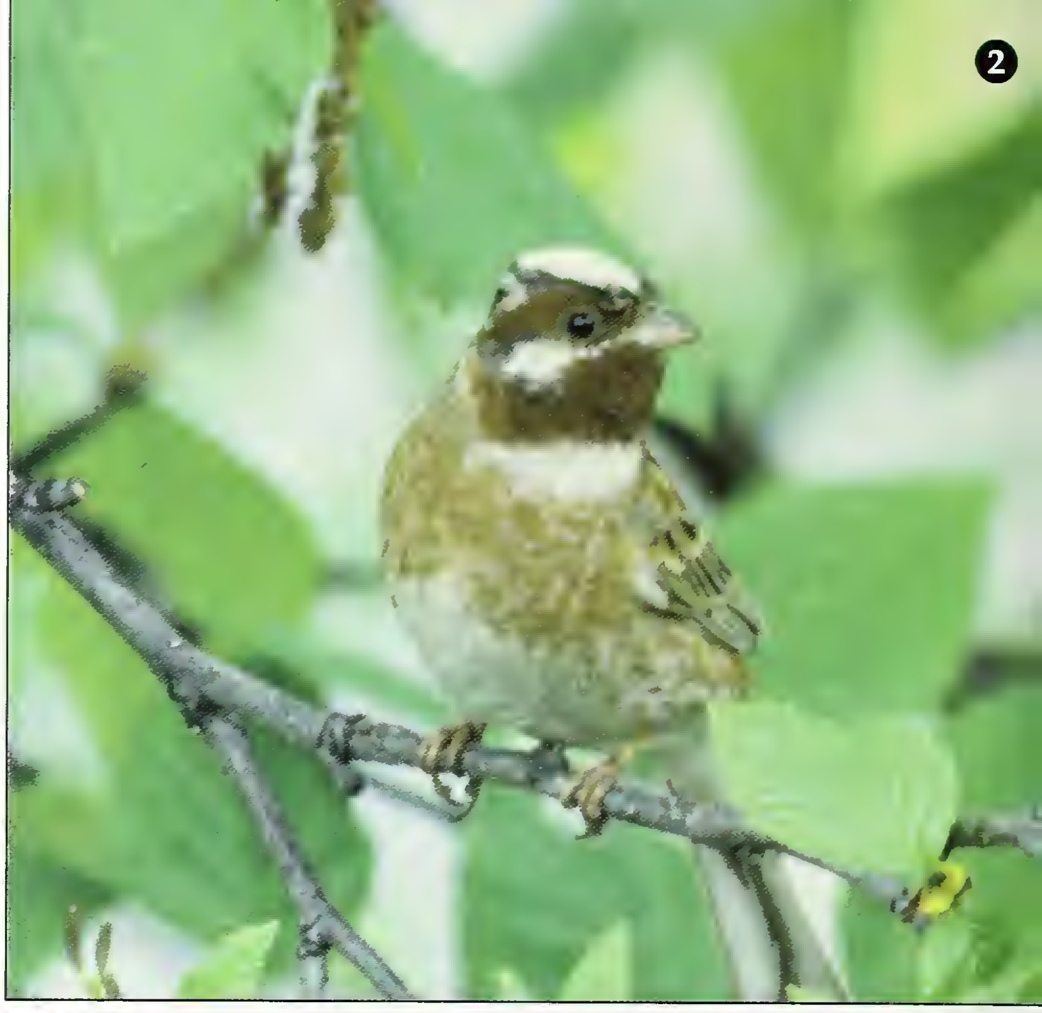

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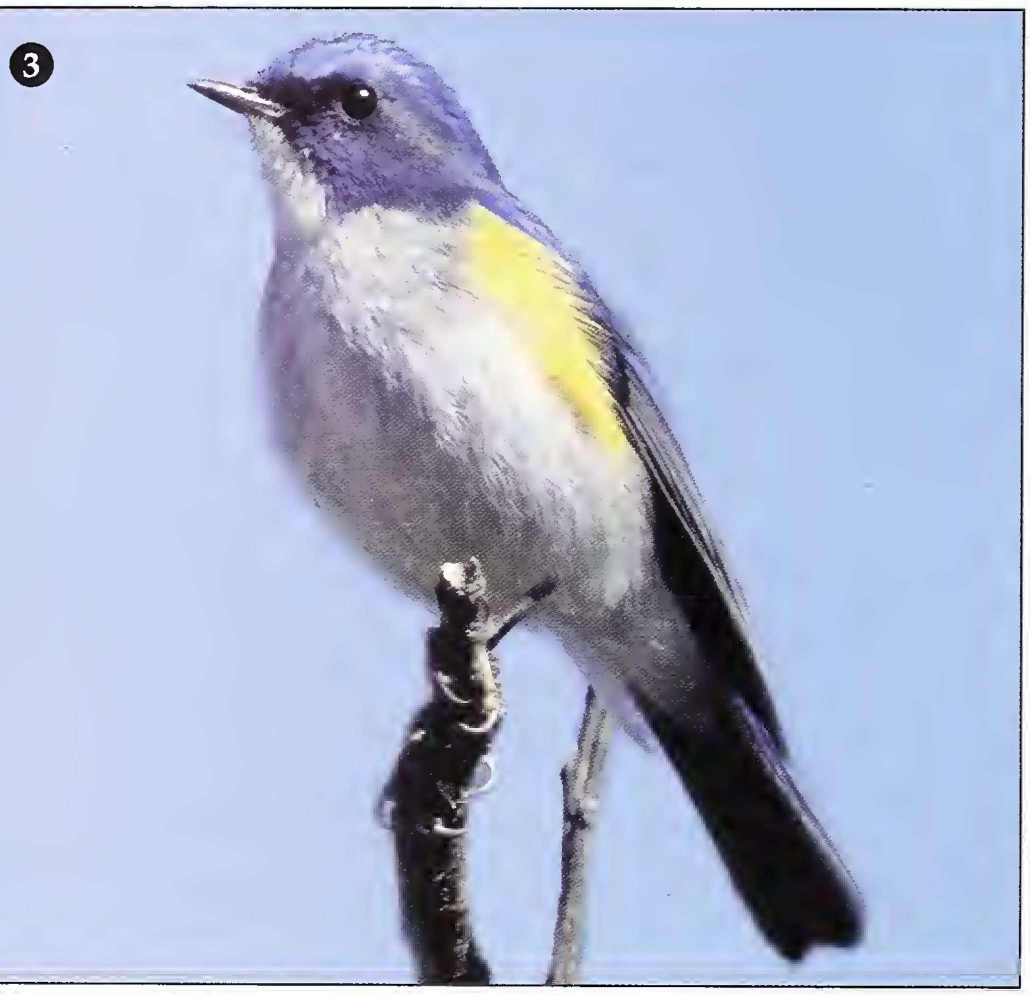

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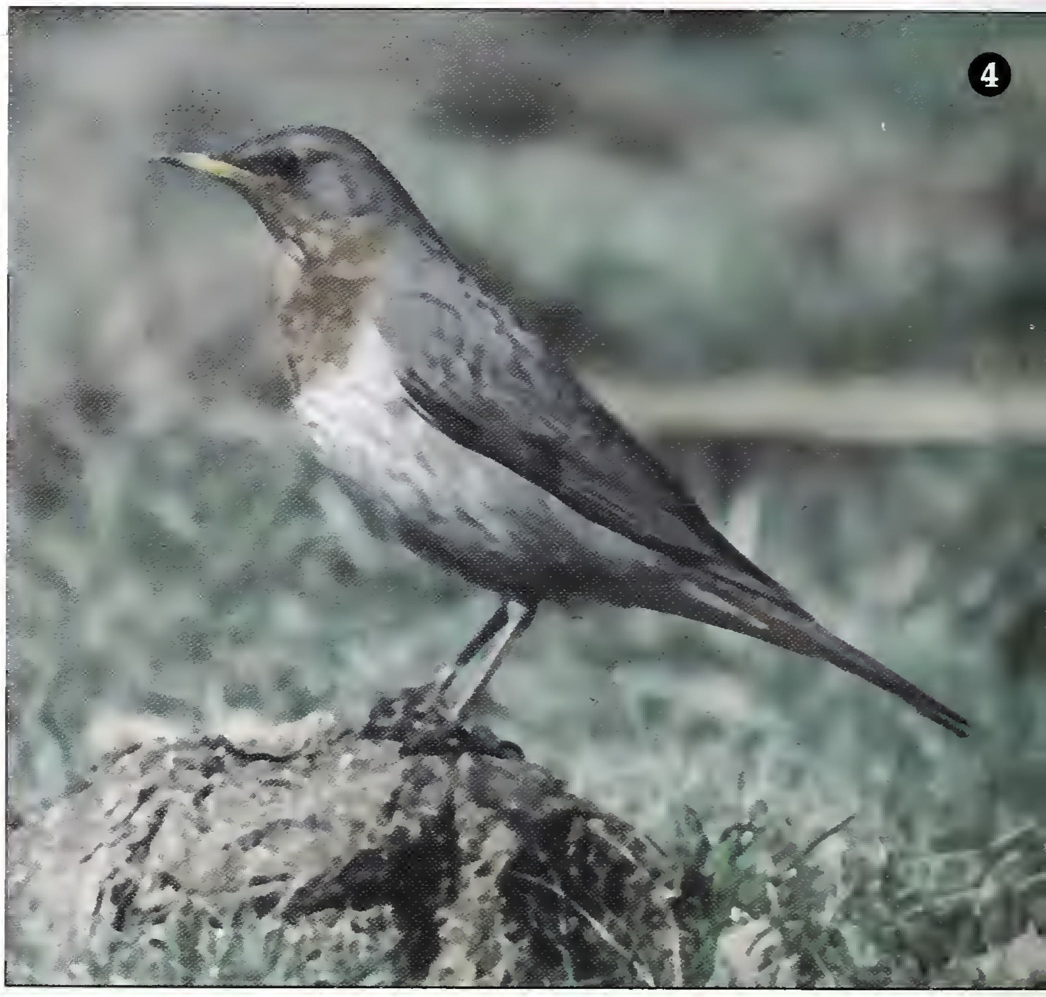

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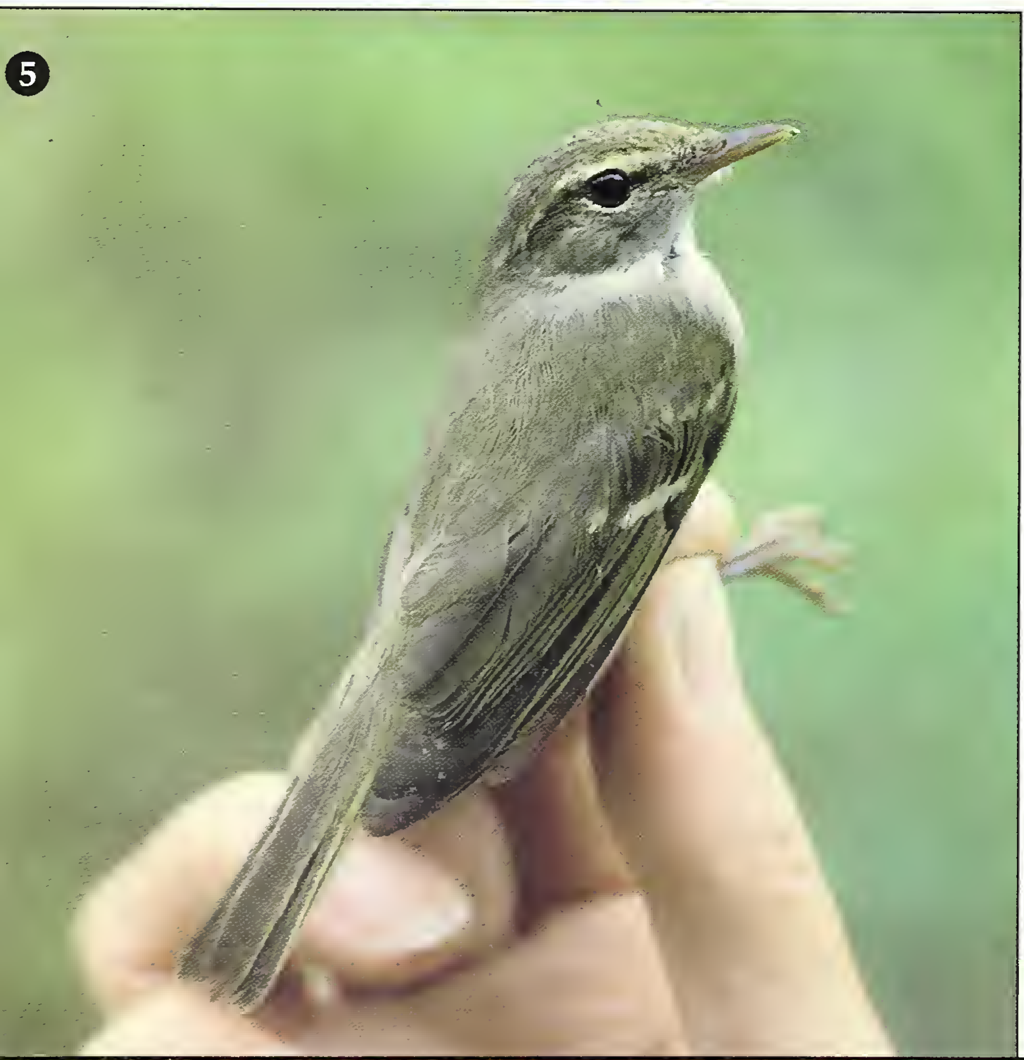

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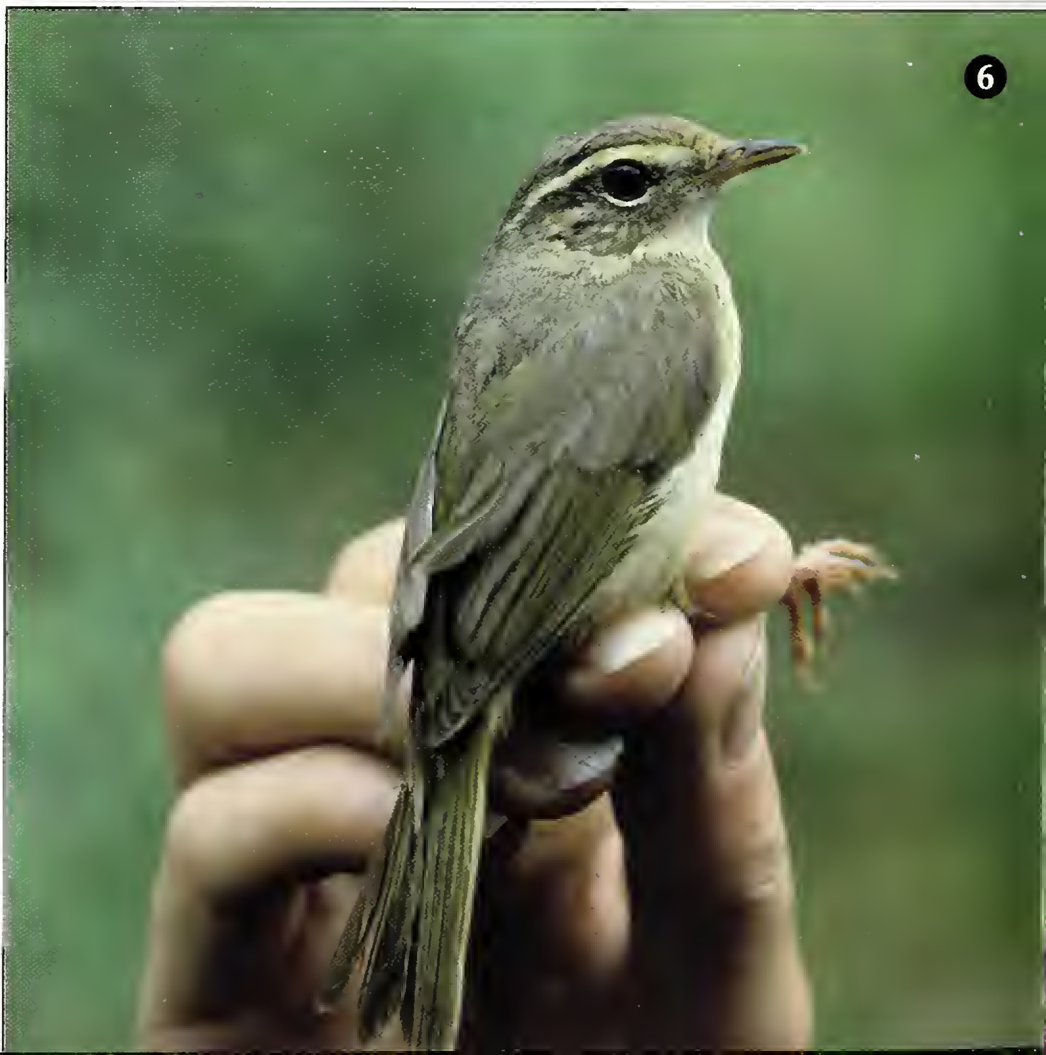

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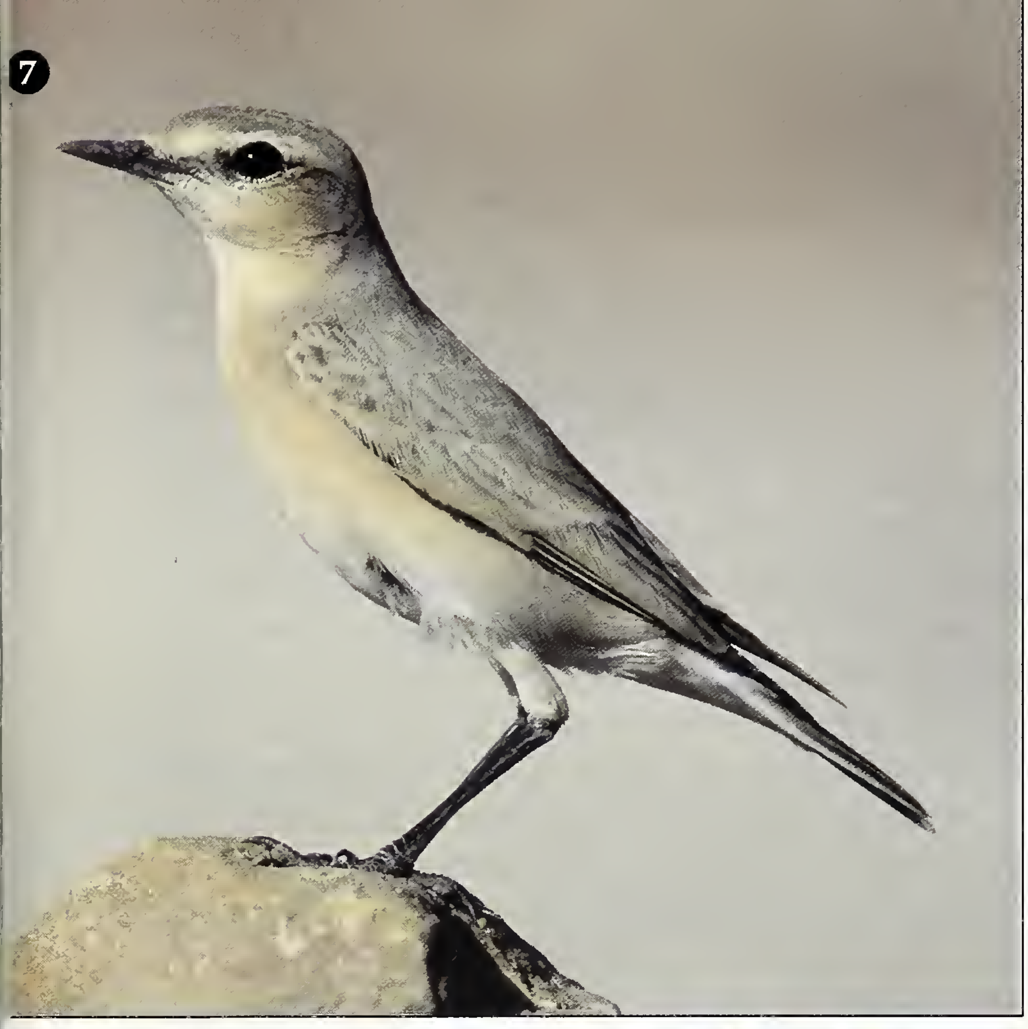

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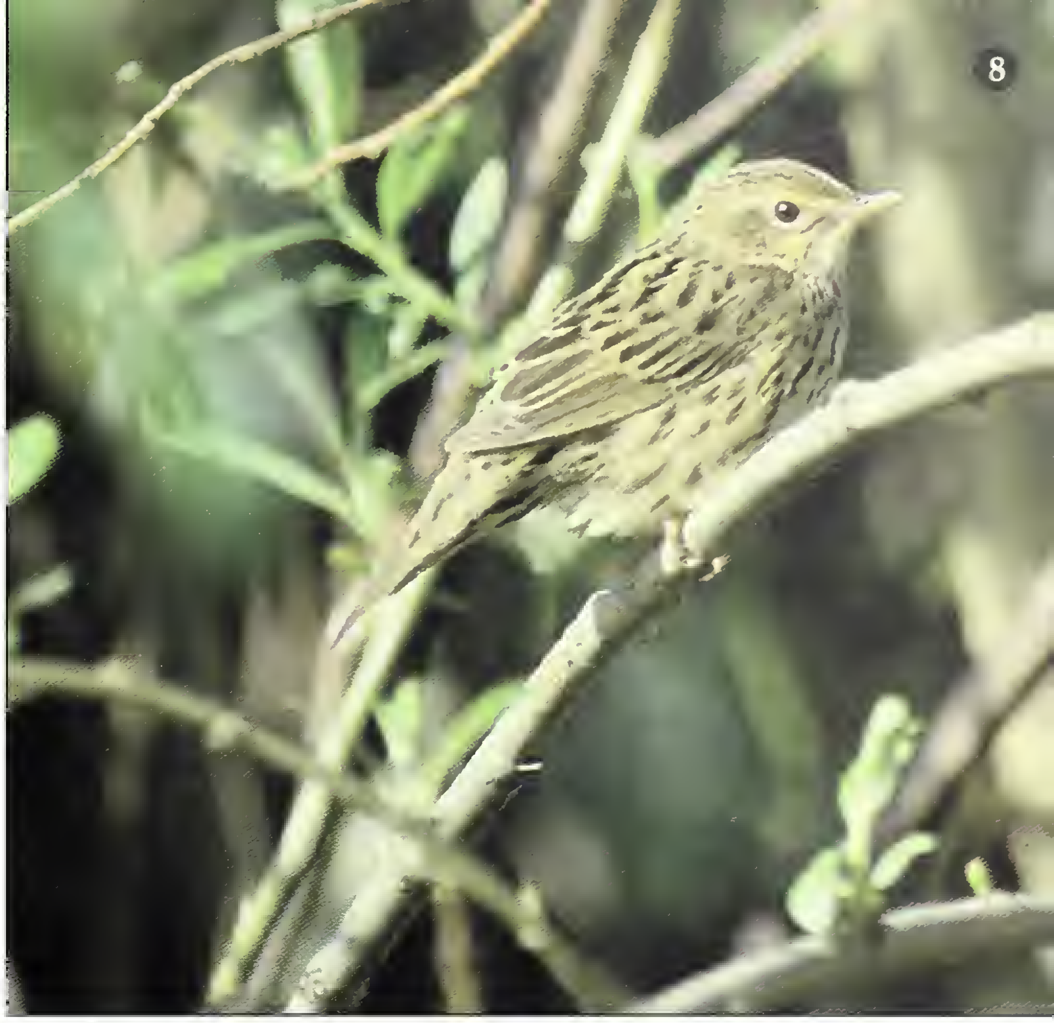

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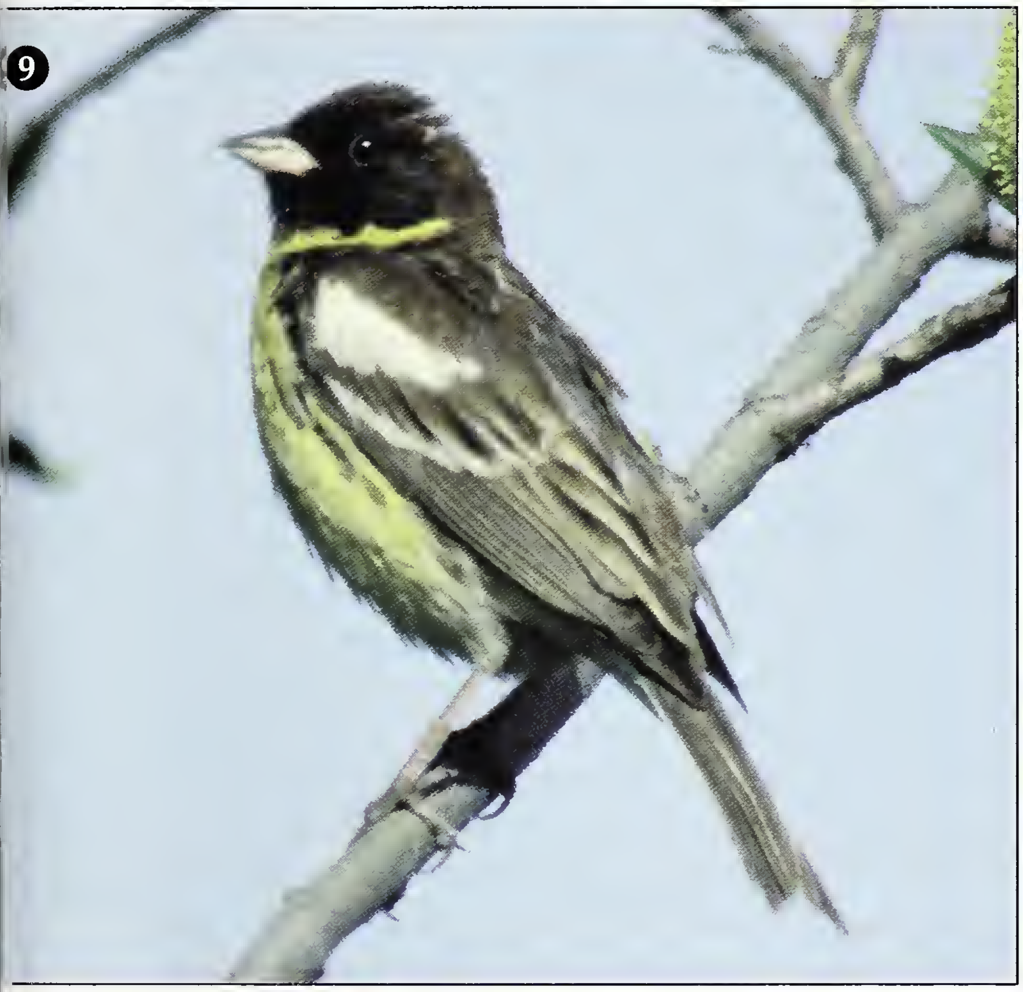

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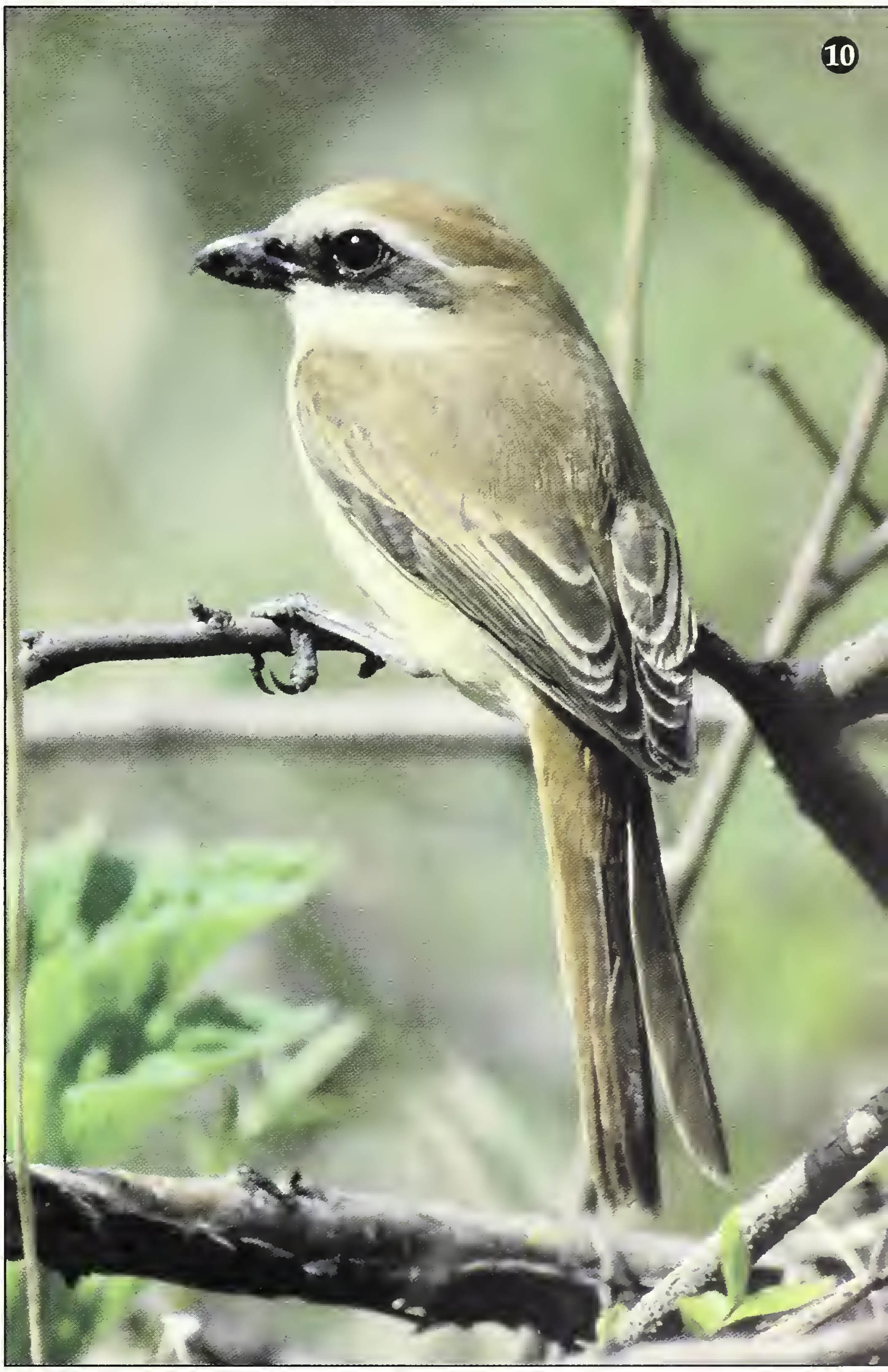

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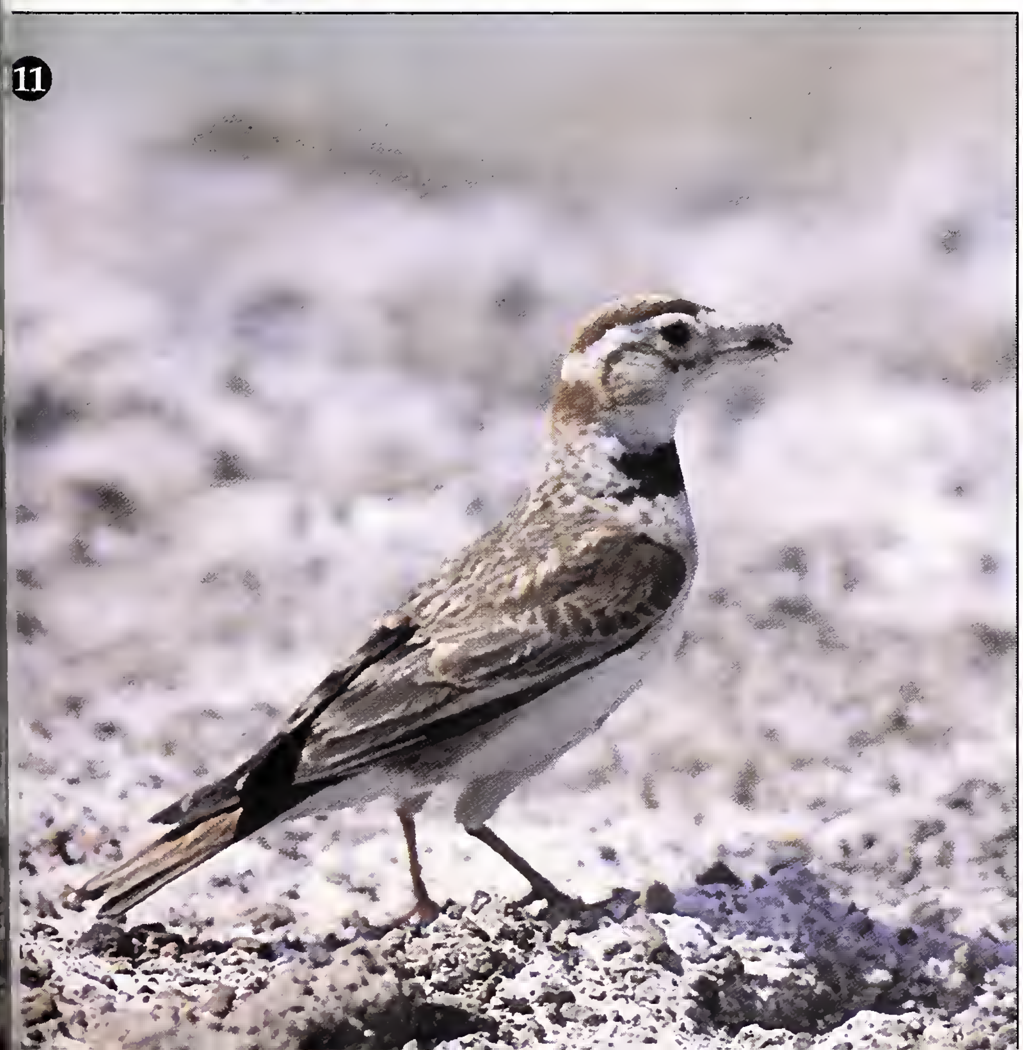

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Accentor *Prunella montanella* was found in good numbers around and slightly below the timberline, with several males delivering their songs from the tops of spruces.

The entire area was found to be especially rich in *Phylloscopus* warblers. The following species were all recorded regularly (given in approximate order of abundance): Two-barred Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides plumbeitarsus*, Arctic Warbler *P. borealis*, Pallas's Leaf Warbler *P. proregulus*, Dusky Warbler *P. fuscatus* and Radde's Warbler *P. schwarzi*. The various species showed at least slightly differing habitat preferences (*cf.* Mild[6]). Two-barred Greenish Warbler was observed in many different habitat types and was the commonest *Phylloscopus* in most of the forests. Arctic Warbler was the only *Phylloscopus* in pure birch forests, where it was found to be common, and was also found in spruce stands. Pallas's Leaf Warbler was found both in spruce forests and in mixed forests containing poplars. It generally occurred in the proximity of clearings and was typically found in the upper crowns of very tall trees. Dusky Warbler seemed confined to lower elevations and was observed mainly in partially open stands of deciduous trees, even in towns and villages. Radde's Warbler was found at the edges of clearings in mixed and deciduous forest. Less frequently encountered were Yellow-browed *P. inornatus* and Hume's Warblers and, surprisingly, (Siberian) Chiffchaff. We recorded Yellow-browed Warbler too infrequently to be able to draw any conclusions concerning its choice of habitat; our observations were, however, consistent with those of Mild,[6] who states that the species is often found in dense thickets of young conifers. We found Hume's Warbler to be fairly common in isolated spruces above the timberline and it was here that we made our only observations of (Siberian) Chiffchaff.

The Steppe by Petropavlovka

a) steppe lakes and surrounding steppe areas

The small town of Petropavlovka (50°38′N 105°20′E) offers accommodation and there is a good restaurant nearby at Bulag Springs, which overlooks a small marsh and a steppe lake. The primary attractions of the area are the two lakes known as 'Belyye Ozera' (White Lakes), located 30 km to the east. These differ in depth and salinity and thus support slightly different populations of breeding birds, such as Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*, here near the southern limit of its breeding range, and a large variety of grebes, ducks and waders, mostly in impressive numbers. Especially common are Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*, with several hundred birds on each lake, and Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*, the typical breeding wader of the lakes. Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* appears to have colonised the lakes recently: this species is known to be expanding its range in the former Soviet Union.[7,8] On 20 June several Falcated Ducks *Anas falcata* were present among the rafts of more widespread species and a single dead tree contained a White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* nest: the White-tailed Eagle is generally uncommon in Buryatia.[9,10] The lakes also offer migrants through the steppe a chance to rest and are thus potential magnets for rare and/or unexpected species. We were fortunate to observe several of these during our visit and details have been published separately.[8]

The surrounding region is heavily used for agriculture and in many places the natural vegetation has been pushed back to the tops of hills. Nevertheless, there are still large intact areas of natural steppe rich in characteristic species such as Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius*, Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*, Common *Grus grus* and Demoiselle *G. virgo* Cranes, Mongolian *Melanocorypha mongolica* and Horned *Eremophila alpestris* Larks, Richards and Blyth's *A. godlewski* Pipits, Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* and Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*. We saw several Pallas's Buntings *Emberiza pallasi* behaving as though on breeding territories; in Buryatia the species was believed to breed only in the higher mountains.[11] The Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* seems still to be maintaining a toehold in the steppe, although its population in the republic has recently declined dramatically.[9,10] We also observed an immature Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* between Bulag Springs and Petropavlovka on both 20 and 22 June: this is another species with a rapidly decreasing population in Buryatia.[12] Great Bustard *Otis tarda* was formerly present in fairly large numbers, both breeding and overwintering regularly,[13] but we observed only a single bird, an adult male, on 22 June. According to local ornithologists (V. Ye. Yeshyeyev, verbally), the species has now essentially disappeared from the area.

b) the Dzhida valley (Nizhny Burgaltai)

The Dzhida valley is known as one of the prime locations in Buryatia for Godlewski's Bunting *Emberiza godlewskii*.[11] On 21 June we visited the Dzelteriyn-Gol, a tributary of the Dzhida river that runs north from Mongolia and joins the Dzhida river near the village of Zheltura (50°28′N 105°06′E), 8 km north of the border. The area contains considerable tracts of appropriate habitat but nevertheless, and despite a lengthy search, we did not manage to find the species. Southern Buryatia represents the northernmost extension of the species' breeding range and within the republic it is known from relatively few sites, possibly as a result of its strict requirement for steep, dry, rocky slopes that face south, south-west or west. It is possible that a relatively recent expansion of the range of Meadow Bunting is responsible for the apparent disappearance of Godlewski's Bunting from the area (Ts.Z. Dorzhiev, pers. comm.).

Species in the Dzhida valley include Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, Steppe *Aquila nipalensis* and Greater Spotted *A. clanga* Eagles, White-backed Woodpecker (a female was seen carrying food in a section of the valley containing only isolated trees, predominantly willows and spruces), Pied Wheatear, Red-throated Thrush, Azure-winged Magpie, Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* (which appears to be expanding its breeding range to the east[8]); and Pine, Meadow, Chestnut-eared, Yellow-breasted and Black-faced Buntings. We also stumbled across an Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo* of the pale Siberian form, presumably *B. bubo turcomanus*.

The Selenga Delta

As mentioned in the introduction, the avifauna of the Selenga Delta has been comparatively well documented. One of the primary attractions is Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus*, a globally threatened species for which the area represents an important breeding site.[14] More widespread species include Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*, several species of dabbling ducks, Eastern Marsh Harrier, other waders including Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* and Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*, 'Mongolian' Gull *Larus (cachinnans) mongolicus*, Rusty-rumped Warbler *Locustella certhiola* and Lanceolated Warbler *L. lanceolata*. We also observed both White-tailed and Imperial Eagles and several Black Storks in the area.

A newly opened research station in Istomino, on the shore of Lake Baikal south of the Selenga Delta, offers accommodation in a prime location for visiting the area, and the small, birch-dominated woodlands and pine plantations on the southern shore of the lake, which represent important staging grounds for the many migrant passerines that pass through the area. The delta itself is relatively hard to scan, although a number of vantage points on the south-west and north-east (reached via the ferry at Treskovo) afford good views. The delta is comprised largely of swamp meadows including large beds of horsetail *Equisetum* sp. Flowering primroses *Primula nutans* and marsh marigolds *Caltha palustris* can be seen and there are also many stands of reeds *Phragmites* sp. and sedge *Carex* sp.

Further details of the birds of the Selenga Delta are provided in a recently published book by workers at Irkutsk State University.[15]

Conclusion

The wetlands around Lake Baikal are comparatively well studied and are attracting a growing number of visitors. In this brief article we have attempted to show that the surrounding region offers additional habitats with rich and diverse avifaunas. Many of these are comparatively poorly studied and visiting ornithologists can make an important contribution to our knowledge of the area.

Acknowledgements

This article results from a two-week trip to the republic undertaken by members of BirdLife Austria. We should like to thank Stephan Weigl of the Biology Centre of the Oberösterreichisches Landesmuseum, Linz, for organising and taking part in our trip. Valeriy Ye. Yeshyeyev of the Buryat Museum of Nature, Ulan-Ude accompanied us, taking us to many places of ornithological interest and discussing Buryatia's birdlife with us. Tsydyp Z. Dorzhiev of the Buryat State University, Ulan-Ude, took a keen interest in our visit and was happy to share his experience and expertise of the region's avifauna. In addition, he generously gave us copies of several publications that we should otherwise have found impossible to obtain.

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Effects of fragmentation and plantations on tropical rainforest birds in the southern Western Ghats, India

(This article descibes the work undertaken by the winners of the 1999–2000 Forktail-Leica Award *of the Oriental Bird Club – eds)*

One of the most serious and reigning concerns in the field of bird conservation today is the fragmentation of tropical rainforests, which are globally renowned for their bird diversity and endemism. The process of rainforest fragmentation may be defined simply as the reduction in area of rainforest and its distribution in smaller and more isolated patches. Globally, between 1981 and 1990, about 150 million ha of tropical forest (9% of the world's total) was deforested, 85% of the area being tropical moist forest. Most previously pristine landscapes now contain only remnant patches and secondary forest. In modern landscapes, these patches or fragments are usually embedded in a landscape matrix of human-altered habitats such as plantations. As large tracts are converted to 'islands' in a 'sea' of altered and developed areas, the survival of their native bird species will hinge upon their ability to persist in human-altered landscapes, and on our ability to conserve and manage these species and their habitats.

In 1999-2000, the Oriental Bird Club granted the *Forktail-Leica Award* to the Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysore, for a conservation study on the effects of rainforest fragmentation and conversion to plantations on bird communities in a highly fragmented rainforest landscape in the southern Western Ghats hill ranges, India. The Western Ghats is recognised among the eight 'hottest' biodiversity hotspots, the Global 200 ecoregions, and the world's Endemic Bird Areas, supporting 16 Restricted-Range species, including 12 of Near-Threatened conservation status. According to the more recent evaluation of threatened Asian birds, the Western Ghats supports populations of one Endangered, three Vulnerable, and seven Near-Threatened species. Biologists have estimated that between 1920 and 1990, forest cover in the Western Ghats declined by 40%, resulting in a four-fold increase in the number of fragments, and an 83% reduction in the size of surviving patches. The OBC sponsored study is one of the first in the region to rigourously examine the effects of such habitat fragmentation on tropical rainforest birds as a prerequisite for planning for their conservation. The study was also partly supported by grants from the MacArthur Foundation, Ministry of Environment and Forests, and the Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore.

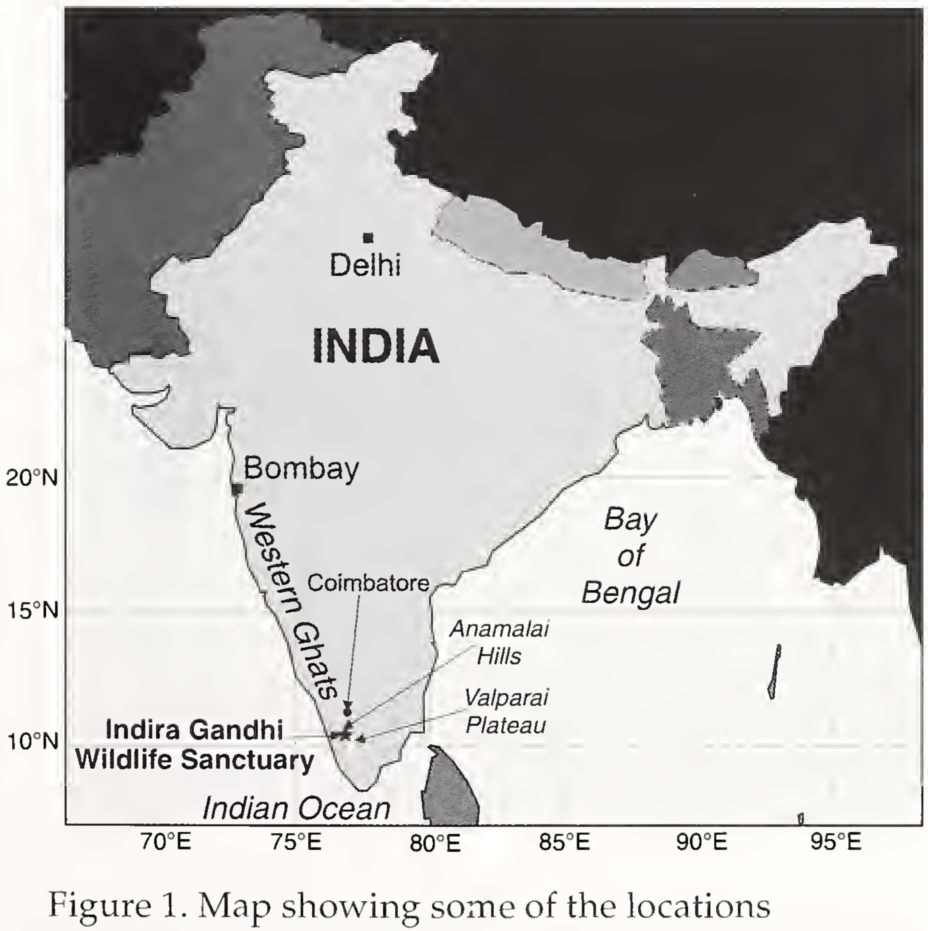

Figure 1. Map showing some of the locations mentioned in the text.

The intensive study site was the mid-elevation (900–1,400 m) rainforest landscape of the Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary and Valparai plateau in the Anamalai hills. Birds were sampled using systematic point count censuses, and habitat measurements were made using standard methods for vegetation description. The study covered three plantations types (tea, coffee, and *Eucalyptus*) and 13 rainforest fragments, ranging in area from 0.3 ha to 2,600 ha. Although 106 bird species were recorded during the study, only 75 species were typical to rainforest, including 10 endemics such as the White-bellied Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis pallipes* and Malabar Grey Hornbill *Ocyceros griseus*, as well as species such as Mountain Imperial Pigeon *Ducula badia*, Asian Fairy Bluebird *Irena puella*, and Dark-fronted

Babbler *Rhopocichla atriceps*. The remaining 31 species of bird were those of open-country and drier forests that had colonised disturbed fragments and plantations. This included species such as the Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*, Oriental Magpie Robin *Copsychus saularis*, and Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius*. Although the infiltration of widespread, open-country species was linked to fragmentation and reduction in area, it was also strongly related to the degree of habitat disturbance. For instance, there were only few open-country species in well-preserved small (<11 ha) fragments, whereas they proliferated even in medium-sized (11–100 ha) rainforest fragments that were highly disturbed. The total number of bird species was highest in medium-sized fragments due to the entry of these widespread open-country species, along with the persistence of many rainforest species. When only rainforest bird species are considered, however, the richness of undisturbed medium-sized and large fragments emerges paramount. Below a threshold fragment size of 10 ha, the number of rainforest bird species declined substantially, particularly where the habitat was highly disturbed due to edge effects and fuel wood removal. Resident rainforest species such as Great Hornbills *Buceros bicornis*, Malabar Trogon *Harpactes fasciatus*, Wynaad Laughingthrush *Garrulax delesserti*, and Nilgiri Flycatcher *Eumyias albicaudata*, and migrants such as the Rusty-tailed Flycatcher *Muscicapa ruficauda* appeared to disappear or decline substantially in abundance in disturbed fragments smaller than 10 ha, although they persisted in relatively less-disturbed small fragments that retained rainforest structural and floristic attributes.

With decreasing size of fragments, species disappeared not in random order but in a sequential 'nested-subset' pattern wherein small fragments contained only subsets of species found in larger fragments. There was, however, considerable idiosyncratic variation across species, and this again appeared to be related more to availability of suitable habitat, rather than simply adequate area in the fragments. Further analysis of the influence of habitat characteristics suggested that a greater *number* of rainforest bird species were packed into areas with well developed rainforest canopy and vertical foliage distribution. However, the *composition* of bird species in fragments was more similar to that in relatively undisturbed rainforest, when the tree species composition of fragments resembled undisturbed rainforest. The maintenance of both structural and floristic attributes of rainforest is thus important for rainforest birds.

Plantations, particularly of tea and *Eucalyptus*, detrimentally affected rainforest birds, although a few (for example, Great and Malabar Grey Hornbills, Malabar Parakeet *Psittacula columboides*, and Yellow-browed Bulbul *Iole indica*) appeared to persist in shade-coffee plantations. Although 17 rainforest bird species did not occur in any of the plantations, those species that did occur also persisted or occurred at higher densities in small and medium-sized fragments in the landscape. Given the value of shade-coffee plantations, their increasing conversion to tea plantations is a matter of concern for bird conservation in the region and needs to be offset through commercially-viable incentives.

Overall, the study shows that even small and medium-sized rainforest fragments, particularly those with relatively undisturbed vegetation, hold significant populations of rainforest bird species, including endemics. These fragments, which are important refuges in the landscape for birds, have hitherto been ignored in conservation policies, and are threatened by continuing degradation. As birds are influenced strongly by habitat characteristics, rather than merely area of the fragments, managing habitat through protection and restoration will significantly aid in bird conservation in the region.

T. R. Shankar Raman, Centre for Ecological Research and Conservation, Nature Conservation Foundation, 3076/5, IV Cross, Gokulam Park, Mysore 570002, India, & Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore 560012, India; E-mail: podocarp@vsnl.net

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Occurrence of *enca*-like crows on Sumba, Indonesia

The Slender-billed Crow *Corvus enca* is a polytypic species whose range suggests an Indonesian origin. However, no Slender-billed Crow has previously been reported for Nusa Tenggara, i.e. the southern part of the Lesser Sundas including Sumba, although the little known Flores Crow *Corvus florensis* may represent the same species complex[1] on one of these islands. The very dry climate in Nusa Tenggara may explain the absence of the Slender-billed Crow because of its association with humid forest.

On 11 August 1997, I took photographs of the only crows I saw during a three-day tour of West Sumba. They were a group of five birds at Ratenggaro, a traditional village at the mouth of a river with residual forest nearby, on the coast west of Waikabubak (see Fig. 1). The behaviour of these birds suggested association with the human settlement. They were first seen and photographed around midday, while foraging among cattle in an enclosure. Two birds perched on the back of a ruminating animal. Afterwards, they all flew into the village, where they congregated around a prominent tree near the river, and flew aerobatically in the breeze, close to the photographer. Lacking field experience of the Slender-billed Crow, I initially mistook them for Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*, the only crow species known on Sumba.[2] Recently, occasional reconsideration of the photographs has led me to notice resemblances to the Slender-billed Crow.

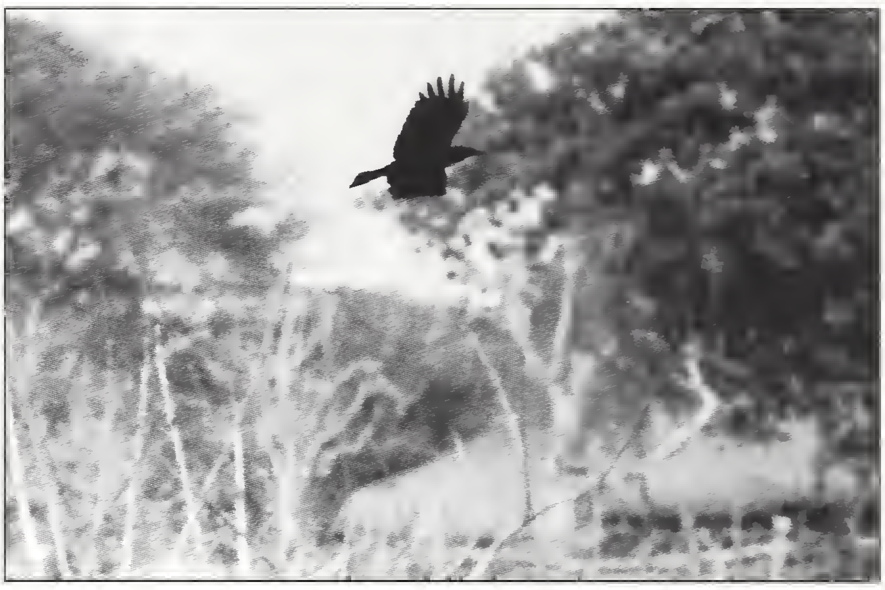

Figure 2. One of the crows at Ratenggaro, West Sumba, on 11 August 1997. A characteristic thatched house is visible in the background. Photo by Tiziano Londei

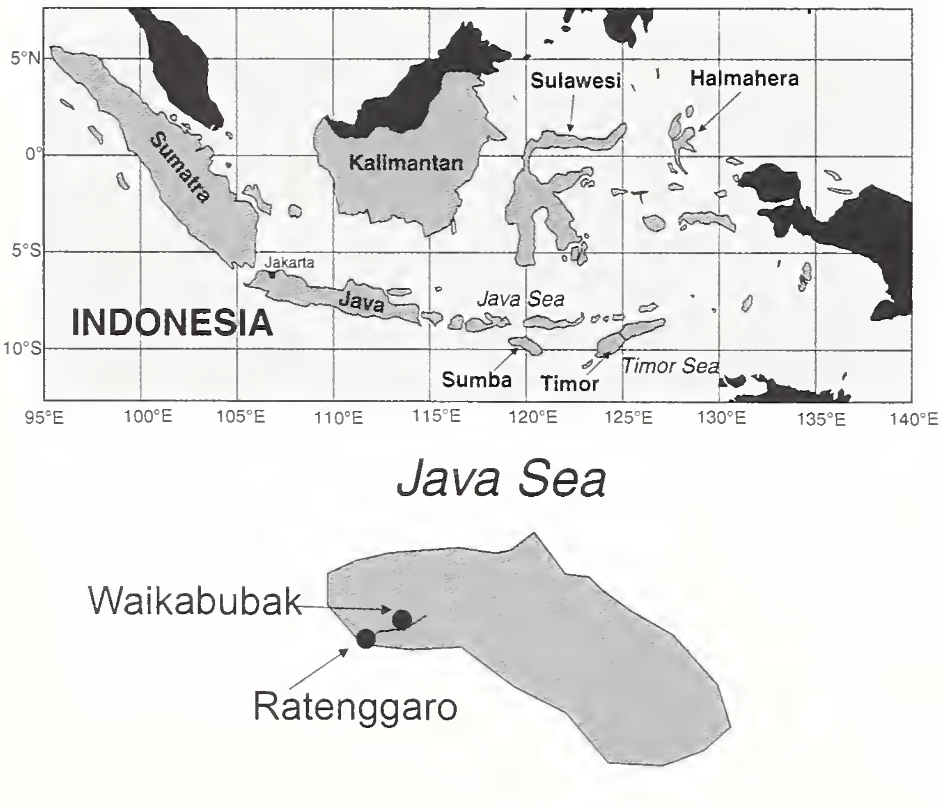

Figure 1. Map showing location of Ratenggaro village, West Sumba, Indonesia

Figure 2 shows the slimmer bill, less prominent primaries, and shorter squarer-ended tail differentiating Slender-billed from Large-billed Crow.[3] As is more evident in other photographs, the tail is about half the length of the wing – a character of the Slender-billed Crow.[1] Moreover, in my colour slides, these birds have their general black colouration tinged with greyish-violet, whereas Large-billed Crows (one of which was photographed on the nearby island of Komodo) all have a brownish-green tinge. Compared with the photographs of museum specimens of the Slender-billed Crow in Vaurie (1958)[1] for bill shape, the birds of Sumba are not easily identified with any of the races illustrated there. However, with their not very slender or decurved bills, they do resemble *celebensis* of Sulawesi, rather than nominate *enca,* whose population on Bali is at about the same distance (400 km) from Sumba. With the birds of Sulawesi, they apparently share a close association with human habitation, which is usually reported as exceptional for the 'shy' Slender-billed Crow.

Whatever their closest relationship, the nature and situation of the birds I observed on Sumba suggest an ancient, reduced population rather than a recent colony. The Slender-billed Crow is not known as an introduced or self-introduced species, Sumba is marginal to sea routes, and Ratenggaro is far from the island's only port of some importance (Waingapu). Given the many endemic birds, mostly forest species, found on Sumba, in spite of this being a less studied island, a Sumbanese form of the *enca* group would not be surprising. *Enca*-like crows on Sumba might have paralleled the Flores Crow by decreasing, following the massive loss of forest cover that has occurred, in more or less recent times, throughout Nusa Tenggara[4] and especially on Sumba.[2] They might now be restricted to the wetter west, which is also the less investigated side of Sumba.

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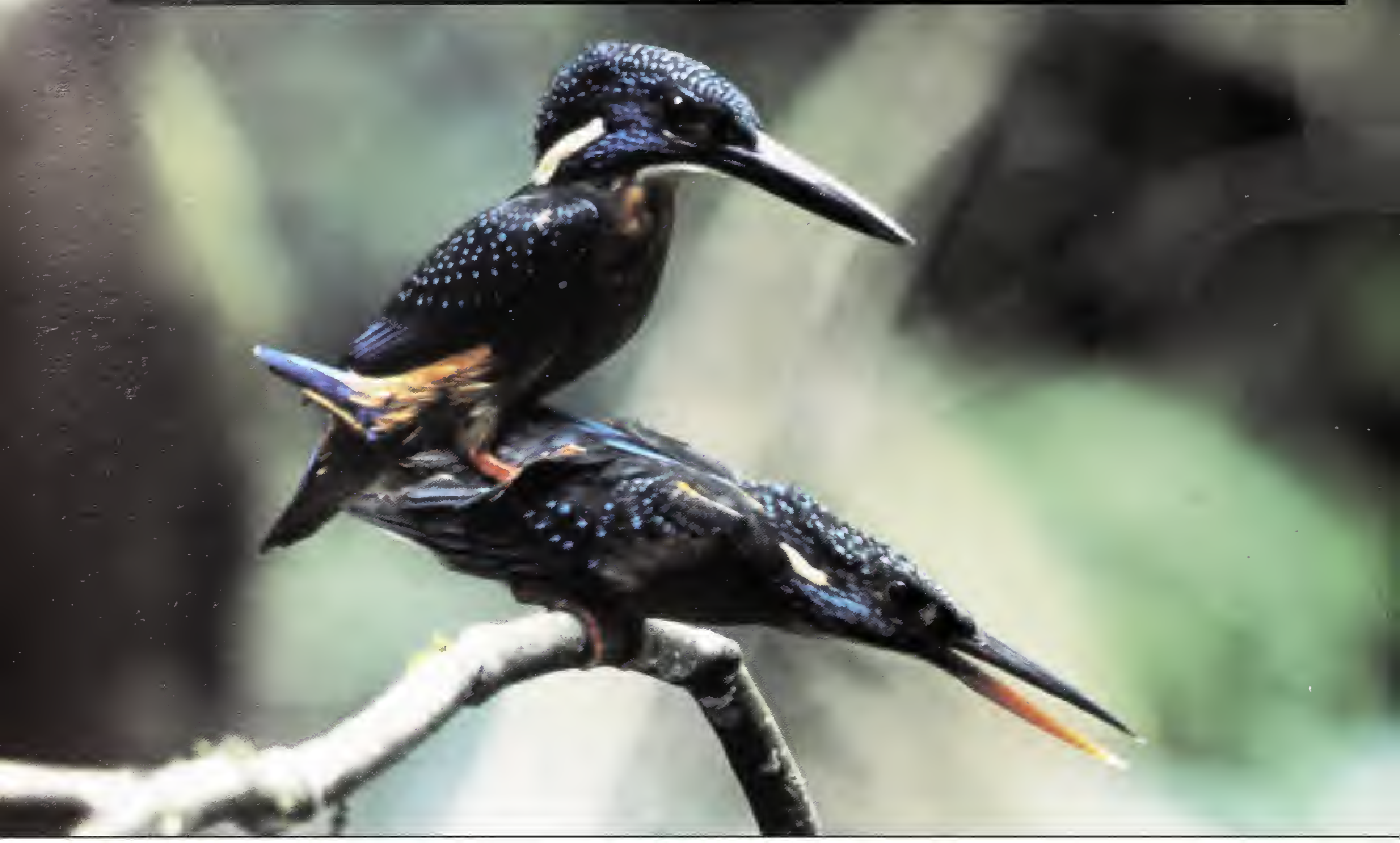
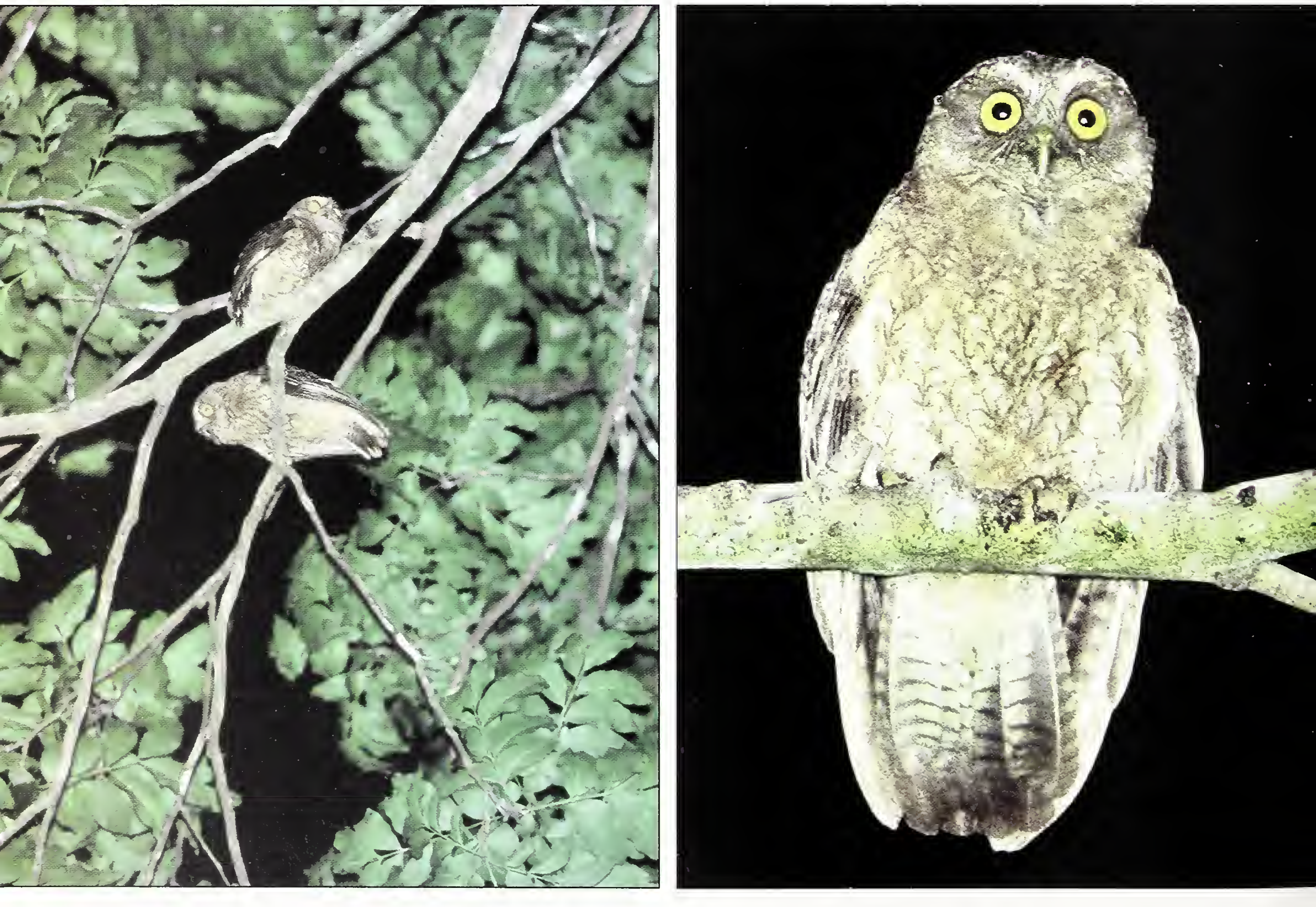
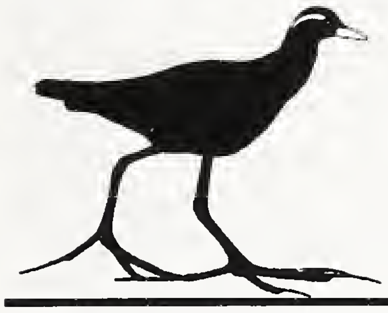


Copulating Blyth's Kingfishers *Alcedo hercules*, April 2002, Chebaling, Guangdong, China. Photo by John Holmes



The first photographs of the new species of hawk owl, recently discovered on Sumba. These Little Sumba Hawk Owls *Ninox sumbaensis* were photographed on 2 January 2002, in forest south of Km 49 (from Waingapu) on the Lewa road, Sumba, Indonesia. Photos by Jerry Olsen and S. Trost. See page 39 for details.



Around the Orient

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Bhutan

Road-widening damages pristine forest
As a result of a border dispute with Assam, visitors to the far east of the country must now travel across Bhutan's only road. As a consequence the government is widening the road for its entire length, causing extensive damage to adjacent forests by the substantial and uncontrolled blasting taking place, in particular along the bird-rich Limithang Road. It threatens to be an environmental catastrophe for some of the most pristine forest in the eastern Himalayas – and its birds.

Source: K. David Bishop posting to *Oriental Birding*, 28 June 2002

Cambodia

Appeal for old telescopes
World Conservation Society Cambodia (WCS) is supporting a local initiative to guard the large waterbird colonies of the Tonle Sap. Up until 1996 these colonies were heavily harvested for eggs and chicks. The team of 24 local villagers (mostly former bird collectors) build platforms near to colonies and guard them 24 hours a day on a rota system and collect data on numbers and breeding success.

The team have been very successful but need three more telescopes. Colin Poole of WCS Cambodia said: 'They have done an amazing job. If anybody can help, or wants more details, please get in touch with me directly at wcs.cp@everyday.com.kh.' Carriage from UK, USA or a variety of Asian countries can probably be arranged or the scopes could be delivered in person....the best time to visit is probably earlier in the year when water levels are still high, as conditions get difficult by mid-March when the water is dropping.

Source: Colin Poole, *WCS Cambodia*

China

Crested Ibis habitat evaluation
An article by Chinese ornithologists in *Ecological Research* journal throws some light on the habitat needs of the critically endangered Crested Ibis *Nipponia nippon*. Habitat quality was evaluated using a geographic information system (GIS). Firstly, maps of topography, vegetation, river, road and villages/towns were digitised and given a suitability index based on perceptions of the needs of the ibis. Secondly, the maps were integrated, and finally the calculated habitat quality was compared with the actual distribution of the species.

Crested Ibis *Nipponia nippon* by Hil Bruinsma

Not surprisingly, birds were present at most 'high quality' sites, but not all, so other factors not considered in this study are limiting distribution. It was also noted that birds preferred lower elevation habitats and tolerated higher levels of human disturbance in recent years than previously thought.

Source: *Ecological Research* (17) 5

India

Vulture virus could reach Europe
Unprecedented numbers of Eurasian Griffons *Gyps fulvus* in western Rajasthan last winter could act as carriers for the 'vulture plague' from the Indian subcontinent into the Middle East, Europe and onwards into Africa.

The virtual disappearance of White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis*, Indian Vulture *Gyps indicus* and Slender-billed Vulture *Gyps tenuirostris* from much of NW India has created a vacuum that Griffons appear to be filling. If they're immigrants from the Middle East and Europe – and become infected by the vulture virus – they could spread the disease across the two continents still unaffected.

In an attempt to trace the origin of the Griffons, a joint RSPB-BNHS team (funded by the British High Commission) will be tagging vultures with satellite transmitters. Ongoing work on the *Gyps* virus has also been funded by the British Government through the Darwin Initiative. Initial findings suggest that the White-rumped Vulture is still in serious decline but that Indian/Long-billed is not declining so much.

Source: Debbie Pain, RSPB

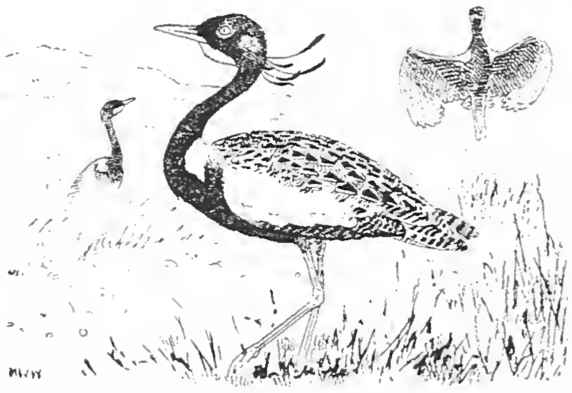
Visceral gout in vultures

Post-mortem analysis of vulture carcases by researchers involved in The Peregrine Fund's Asian Vulture Crisis Project has revealed widespread visceral gout. To quote Martin Gilbert of The Peregrine Fund: 'Visceral gout is an end stage condition that is known to follow a range of metabolic, infectious, toxic and dietary disorders that result in a failure in kidney function.' The Peregrine Fund has done much of its vulture research in Pakistan and has investigated – and discounted – influenza/ bronchitis, poisoning by heavy metals, the nephrotoxin DRC-1339 (Starlicide) and organophosphates as causes. Researchers are now appealing to the wider ornithological community for theories on its occurrence.

There's much more on The Peregrine Fund website at: http://www.peregrinefund.org/conserv_vulture.html

Lesser Floricans in greater numbers

The globally threatened Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica* appears to be thriving despite an otherwise debilitating drought in its traditional habitats in southern Rajasthan and the neighbouring areas of Madhya Pradesh. As many as 30–35 male birds were seen during July–August and breeding was also confirmed as females hatching eggs were located. Thakur Dijvijay Singh of Damotar, an avid Florican watcher, spotted 15 males in Chittorgarh district. He also managed to photograph a female at the nest (published in *The Hindu* newspaper). He claims that this is the first time such a picture has been taken. Fears that the drought may have had a serious adverse impact on the birds have been allayed.



Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica* by Martin Woodcock

Source: *The Hindu*, October 4, 2002

New hope for Himalayan Quail?

A preliminary report by the South Asia Office of the World Pheasant Association found that 'villagers seemed to be familiar with the Himalayan Quail *Ophrysia superciliosa* in at least three sites', giving hope that this Critically Endangered species, last seen more than a century ago may still exist.

Source: Partridge, Quail and Francolin Specialist Group Newsletter 17

New Indian subcontinent endemic

A reappraisal of the taxonomy of the 'lesser spotted eagle' complex has found that the Indian Spotted Eagle *Aquila hastata* should be recognised as a valid species in its own right and no longer considered a subspecies of the Lesser Spotted Eagle *A. pomarina*. Perhaps surprisingly, this is not a new finding as the two were separated by many taxonomists in the 19th and early 20th Centuries and only recently lumped. The recent appraisal of their taxonomy, by Parry and co-workers, is published in *Ibis* 144: 665–675. (An OBC Bulletin article on the field identification of Indian *Aquila* eagles is in preparation. See *Stray Feathers*, page 84 *–eds*)

Dalmatian Pelican shot at Bund Baretha

Disturbing news from an Austrian birder who witnessed the shooting of a Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus* at Bund Baretha 45 km from Keoladeo Ghana (Bharatpur) in Rajasthan on 27 February 2002. *(Bund Baretha is an official Wildlife Sanctuary, so hunting should be strictly prohibited –eds).*

Two pelicans were approached by three people in a boat. One was shot and hauled into the boat. Aaron Ofner, who witnessed the killing, said: 'We supposed the birds are either killed for food or the fishermen see them as competition for the fish and try to kill them or at least scare them away.'

At least seven additional species listed in the *Threatened Birds of Asia* were present on the same day, including Sarus Cranes *Grus antigone*, Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*, and Indian

Skimmers *Rynchops albicollis* (the target species for most birders visiting Bund Baretha).

Source: Aaron Ofner, via E-mail

Large-billed Reed Warbler – a valid species

A morphological and DNA re-examination of the Large-billed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus orinus*, known only from its type specimen collected in 1867 in Himachal Pradesh, India, has revealed that it is valid species. It is most closely related to Blyth's Reed Warbler *A. dumetorum* but has a more rounded wing, longer bill, longer and more graduated tail with pointed tail feathers and larger claws.

Source: *Ibis* 144: 259–267

INDONESIA

A new hawk owl from Sumba

Since the late 1980s ornithologists have reported an unknown *Otus* owl on Sumba. From a specimen of this unknown owl the authors cited below analysed the mitochondrial cytochrome b gene in feathers, and compared its sequence with those in their data library, which includes most owl genera. A phylogenetic analysis unequivocally places the unknown owl into the *Ninox* clade. It differs from Southern Boobook *N. novaeseelandiae* and Brown Hawk Owl *N. scutulata* by 8.2 and 9.1% nucleotide substitutions, but the *Ninox* data set contains few representatives so it is not yet possible to define which other *Ninox* species it is most closely related to. There was no overlap in measurements of body length or mass for this specimen and those of other *Ninox* known from the region. The call was a monosyllabic hoot, repeated about every three seconds and quite unlike the repeated '*cluck-cluck-cluck*' made by the endemic Sumba Boobook *N. rudolfi* or the disyllabic notes made by most *Ninox*. The new species has been assigned the common name Little Sumba Hawk Owl. The conservation status of this owl has yet to be determined but is clearly Data Deficient.

Source: Olsen, J., M. Wink, H. Sauer-Gürth & S. Trost (2002) *Emu* 102: 221–231

(see page 36 for pictures of the new owl.)

Indonesia imposes permanent ban on log exports

Forestry minister Muhammad Prakosa said around 5,000 ha of the country's lush forests had been lost to illegal logging every day for the past five years. 'The export of logs and wood chips, which were previously limited, has been banned,' he announced in June. A ban on log exports was imposed in 1980 but later replaced with a 200% export tax. By the end of 2000 the tax had been reduced to 10% as part of an agreement with the International Monetary Fund. Environmentalists said illegal logging became more rampant after the tax reduction.

Source: *Reuters*, June 26, 2002

And illegal logging will bring more droughts – and floods

Prolonged droughts and forest fires will continue to hit the country during the dry season as more and more protected forests are destroyed by illegal logging, the Indonesian Forum for the Environment (*Walhi*) has said. Illegal logging has been rampant in many areas, such as Mt. Leuser and Kerinci Seblat National Parks, following the economic crisis of 1997.

'With a moratorium, we could easily arrest those carrying out logging,' *Walhi* executive director Longgena Ginting said. He added that Indonesia should take a lesson from China which implemented a ten-year logging moratorium in the 1980s.

Source: *Jakarta Post*, September 16, 2002

But it's not all gloom and doom…

Edward Pollard made this contribution to the Oriental Birding newsgroup:

'On a slightly more positive note I have to add that maybe all is not lost. I have been working for The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in Berau Regency in East Kalimantan. I did not have high hopes but was amazed by the amount of forest still remaining here. There still are large areas, 100s of thousands of hectares, of lowland and hill dipterocarp forest that has not yet been logged, as well as plenty more that has been logged but at least is still forest and as yet not planned for conversion to oil palm. TNC has been here now for about a year trying to develop strategies to conserve these last remaining patches of untouched forest. Only time will tell whether their strategy of engaging all stakeholders from local communities and government to logging firms will work. But the point is that all is not lost and despite all that is going against us we should try not to take a defeatist attitude and do what we can for what little remains, whether that be Danum valley or Melinau basin in Sabah, the patches in northern East Kalimantan, Brunei or elsewhere.

Source: Edward Pollard, *OrientalBirding*, July 11, 2002

Opencast mining plans for protected areas

The Indonesian government wants to allow opencast mining in protected forest areas in a bid to get more cash out of the country's vast natural resources and to speed up the pace of development in its eastern provinces. But the plan has sparked protests from environmentalists, who said that it would permanently damage the ecosystem and harm local residents' long-term economic prospects. Parliament is now considering approving 150 separate mining projects. Sources said that out of that number, 50 could get the green light soon, with 22 proposals – a total investment value of around US$3.2 billion said to be done deals.

Source: *Straits Times*, September 7, 2002

Hunting resort plan adjoining national park

A plan to open a 250 ha hunt resort in West Lampung Regency has sparked condemnation from environmental activists who say the local administration is trying to legalise rampant poaching from the Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park by the back door. West Lampung Regent I Wayan Dhirpa rejected the criticism, saying the hunt resort was aimed at curbing poaching while improving locals' financial condition. The local administration has gained 200 deer from the Bogor Presidential Palace for hunting and was building ten luxury cottages for tourists. Wayan added that the resort would feature targeted animals, marked with certain signs and that tourists found guilty of killing unmarked species would be brought to court.

Source: *Jakarta Post*, July 31, 2002

Tribal group talks turkey to save hornbill

Ethnic groups in Sarawak are being encouraged to use turkey feathers to decorate their traditional costumes in a bid to save the hornbill, the emblem of the state, from extinction.

A youth group from the Kelabit tribe, known as Ana'k Adik Rurum Kelabit, is spearheading a campaign to protect the state's wildlife. At the Rainforest World Music Festival, the group demonstrated the use of turkey feathers to decorate their costumes – the feathers were painted to resemble those of hornbills. It says that in this way ethnic groups can still practise their traditions and save the bird. The group has the support of the Sarawak State Agriculture Department, which is providing it with turkey feathers.

Source: *Straits Times*, July 16, 2002

TNI linked to illegal bird trade

The office of Animal Conservation for Life (KSBK) has reported that some members of the Indonesian Military (TNI) are involved in the transportation of hundreds of protected birds. A recent investigation by KSBK disclosed that tens of thousands of parrots had been poached from Maluku and Papua and transported to Java and Bali islands, some with the help of Navy warships such as TNI Teluk Manado No. 537. Poached species include Yellow-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua sulphurea* and Red-and-blue Lory *Eos histrio*, to be sold at local bird markets.

KSBK are planning an awareness-raising Parrot Tour campaign in several places including East Java, West Java, Bali, Papua and North Maluku provinces.

Source: *Jakarta Post*, July 18, 2002

Observations of Bruijn's Brush-turkey *Aepypodius bruijnii* on Waigeo, Papua

A survey of Mount Nok, on the far eastern side of Waigeo's Majalibit Bay – undertaken by Iwein Mauro – resulted in the first observations in the wild of the virtually unknown species. On 14–15 May 2002, Mauro discovered three incubation mounds in hill ridgetop forest at 690–715 m. One was in use, and careful monitoring over 14 field days produced five sightings of the male. Another five brief sightings were made, all of solitary birds scurrying away.

Its continued existence on the island was confirmed on 23 February 2001 (see OBC Bull 33 p42) and more recently, a live individual was trapped by a hunter on Doom, an islet just off Sorong, in the north-western district of the Papua province of Indonesia.

It seems to be a very low-density species, largely confined to higher-altitude forest, and may be extremely sensitive to human disturbance. However, the precipitous terrain it inhabits remains in pristine condition, rarely, if ever, visited by people.

When encountered, the bird typically ran off – even at extremely close range – begging the question that it might perhaps have evolved to a flightless form, a merely speculative thought for now, though supported by the testimonies of several locals. Follow-up work is imperative.

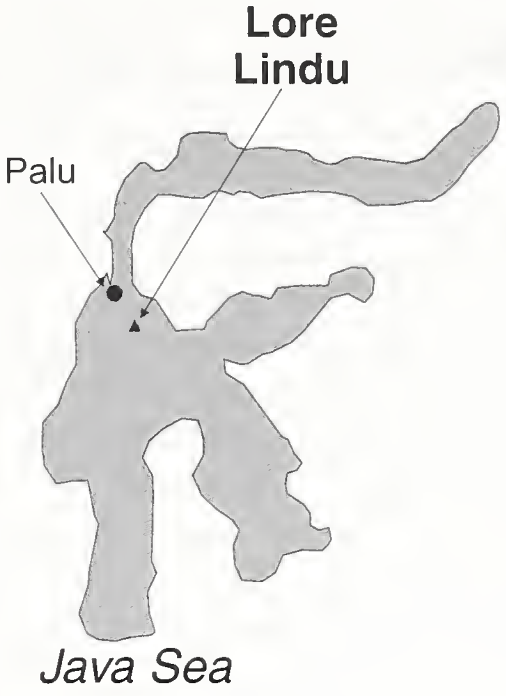
Source: Natuurmuseum Rotterdam news release, September 13, 2002

(see page 49 for photos of the bird)

But Sulawesi's megapode is under threat
Environmentalists in Sulawesi are sounding the alarm for the dwindling population of the Maleo. It has disappeared from 44 known sites. In Tangkoko Dua Saudara, North Sulawesi, for instance, the population was reported to have dropped by 80% due to uncontrolled egg collection. Research conducted by the Jambata Foundation, showed that out of 46 locations where Maleo could be found, its existence was considered 'threatened' at 11 sites, and 'very threatened' at 16 sites. In the remaining sites (in Lore Lindu National Park), the birds were considered safe.

Despite the problems, efforts to breed the bird in captivity are slowly progressing and breeding sites have been set up in several regencies. And in these areas, sadly, the threat comes from government officials who take the eggs as 'souvenirs' for their bosses. Some locals are even in collusion with forestry officers to sell Maleo eggs.

Source: *Jakarta Post*, June 25, 2002



Map of Sulawesi showing location of Lore Lindu

And Sulawesi's hawk eagle is being killed as pest
The majestic Sulawesi Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus lanceolatus* is being hunted down by local residents who blame it for eating livestock. Local environmentalists have sounded the alarm that it may well be the beginning of the end for the species. The endemic eagles' biggest enemy is farmers who live around Lore Lindu National Park. About 60 villages have sprung up over the past few years around the 218,000 ha park.

The bird is still easily seen in Lore Lindu, in flocks of up to seven birds, said Yulinda Asnita, a student from Universitas Negeri Jakarta who researched the species for several months in 2001. Nevertheless, it is decreasing fast.

The loss of the Hawk Eagle would spark an outcry, as Lore Lindu is known internationally as a centre for the protection of birds, with 224 species living in the forest, 83% of them endemic to Sulawesi.

Source: *Jakarta Post*, June 18, 2002

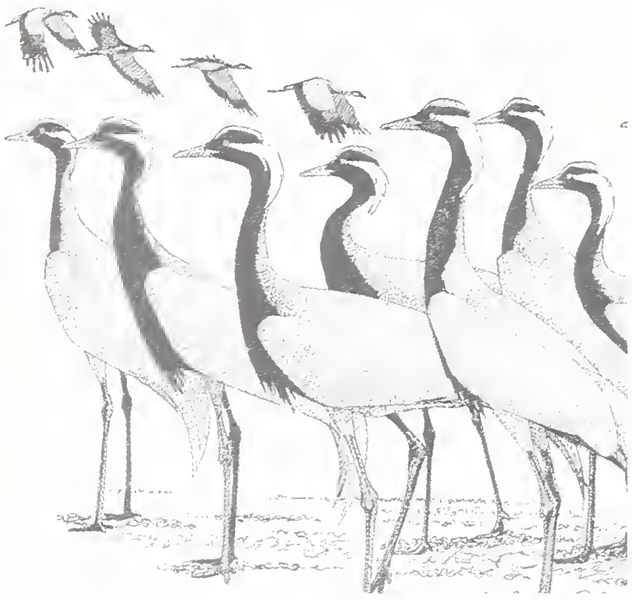
Japan

A new threat to Isahaya Bay
The Japan Wetlands Action Network (JAWAN) has raised the alarm over a renewed threat to Isahaya Bay, a key wintering area for Saunders's Gulls *Larus saundersi*.
In 1997 3,550 ha of tidal-flats were closed off from the sea, resulting in massive and predictable declines in fisheries and the loss of economically critical seaweed harvests. The government has just started work on building an 'inner dike' to ensure the permanent conversion and loss of tidal-flats.

JAWAN has launched an E-mail campaign in opposition to this project; contact the organisers at margaret8739@deluxe.ocn.ne.jp or check the news section of Wetlands & Birds Korea's (WBK) website www.wbkenglish.com.

Source: Nial Moores, *Wetlands and Birds Korea*

(Tidal-flats are key to the survival of species such as Relict *Larus relictus* and Saunders's Gull, Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmeus*, Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer*, Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* and Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes* and large-scale coastal reclamation projects like that at Isahaya Bay are not just confined to Japan: China and Korea are losing vast areas of mud-flats too: 10,000 ha at Namyang Bay and 40,100 ha of the Yellow Sea's most important shorebird site, Saemankeum, respectively – eds)



Demoiselle Cranes *Grus virgo*
by Nik Borrow
(Courtesy of Birdquest)

Mongolia

Mass poisoning of cranes and raptors
Ornithologists led by Prof. Sumya and Magister Gombobaatar from the Mongolian State University have reported mass mortality of Demoiselle Cranes *Grus virgo* and other species, most notably Golden Eagles *Aquila chrysaetos*, Saker Falcons *Falco cherrug*, Upland Buzzards *Buteo hemilasius*, Daurian Jackdaws *Corvus dauuricus*, Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus* and graminivorous passerines, probably as a result of seed dressing with DDT. Several human deaths have also been reported.

Apparently, nomadic herders have received large consignments of poisoned grain from the local authorities to distribute in vole high-density areas. The scale of the poisoning is huge and covers at least two-thirds of Mongolia.

Source: Eugene Potapov, Falcon Research Institute, posting to *Oriental Birding* June 7, 2002

Nepal

20th anniversary of Bird Conservation Nepal
BCN has marked its 20th anniversary with a special issue of its newsletter *Danphe* guest-edited by Carol Inskipp. It can be downloaded from the BCN/Birdlife Nepal website at: www.birdlifenepal.com. Articles include: *Does the Eurasian Griffon Vulture feed on the dead bodies of conspecific individuals*? and *Revisiting Nepal's protected lowland areas 1982–2002*. There's also an announcement that former BCN president Hem Sagar Baral has received his PhD from Amsterdam University for his thesis '*Community structure and habitat associations of grassland birds in lowland Nepal*.' He is the first Nepali ornithologist to be awarded a doctorate – well done Hem !

Sri Lanka

National park to re-open after rebel ceasefire
The Wilpattu National Park has remained closed since 1983 following an attack by the LTTE (Tamil Tigers) but the peace deal signed with the Sri Lankan government should see the park re-open. But first the LTTE will have to co-operate in the clearance of landmines they've laid during their 20-year campaign for a separate Tamil state.

Source: *Sri Lanka Wildlife News*, May 6, 2002

Taiwan

Chinese Crested Tern
In view of the recent concern over the continued existence of Chinese Crested Tern *Sterna bernsteini*, the following observations, reported on Ben King's website, might be of interest: 'In early August, I visited the Taiwan-owned Matzu Islands, just off the East China coast of Fujian Province. The Chinese Crested Tern had been found nesting in these islands two years ago, the first confirmed records in 70 years or so, easing fears that the species might already be extinct. They apparently did not breed there in 2001. However, in late July 2002, several pairs were found breeding again in the Matzu Islands. I was very fortunately able to spend an entire day watching 5-6 adults and 1 nearly fledged youngster from a distance. It was one of my most exciting and satisfying field experiences to see this beautiful "ghost" come to life. The Chinese Crested Terns were in a large colony of Great Crested Terns.' Good news indeed!

Source: *Oriental Birding* newsgroup contribution by K. David Bishop

Thailand

OBC joins international protest against Mekong dredging
As previously reported in *Around The Orient* (OBC Bulletin 35 p59), China, Myanmar, Laos and Thailand have agreed to dredge the Mekong river along their borders to facilitate the year-round passage of commercial shipping. The project threatens several internationally-important populations of waterbirds including the newly described Mekong Wagtail *Motacilla samveasnae*. Happily,

Oriental Bird Club
P.O. Box 324, Bedford, MK42 0WG, UK.

We, the 1,800 members of the Oriental Bird Club, are deeply concerned about the potential impacts of the Lancang-Mekong Navigation Channel Improvement Project and are concerned that the project is proceeding without a thorough and careful examination of its impacts on the environment and people's livelihoods.

As you are well aware, the Mekong River is a complex and rich ecosystem upon which millions of people depend for their livelihoods. Many have adapted to the river's ebbs and flows, relying on the river's diverse and vibrant fisheries, cultivating vegetables on the riverbanks and using the river for transport and drinking water. However, this delicate balance is in jeopardy due to blasting and dredging for the Lancang-Mekong Navigation Channel Improvement Project.

Poor environmental impact assessment

Despite its potentially far-reaching impacts, the navigation project is proceeding without a comprehensive investigation of the project's social and environmental impacts. A recent article in the Cambodian Daily stated that the environmental impact assessment was "not up to international standards." The project also fails to meet Thai legal standards on environmental impact studies and public participation, in violation of the agreement between China, Burma, Laos and Thailand. Senators from Thailand have voiced reservations about the project and called for serious and careful study of its environmental impacts.

Destruction of rapids, reefs and shoals

The most serious impact of the project is the blasting and clearance of many rapids, shoals and scattered reefs to facilitate navigation. The destruction and blasting will have wide-ranging ecological impacts on countries located along the entire length of the Mekong. Rapids and reefs comprise some of the most productive riverine habitats, serving as vital breeding grounds and safe haven for fish and other forms of aquatic life, including plants such as Mekong seaweed (kai). Blasting the rapids and reefs could jeopardize the survival of rare species such as the Mekong giant catfish, which spawns in the rapids. The reefs also play an important role in producing oxygen, reducing pollution and aiding in decomposition of vegetation. Because of their high productivity, islets and rapids are a source of food and income for small fishermen who rely on the river for their livelihoods.

Destruction of the rapids and dredging of the river channel may also have serious impacts on water flow, impacting people who live along the banks of the Mekong and have adapted to the river's flood-drought cycle. Without the rapids, the river may flow faster, eroding the riverbanks and damaging riverside plantations.

Impacts on Cambodia and Vietnam

While the navigation project directly affects people living in China, Myanmar, Laos and Thailand, it is also likely to have far-reaching impacts on people in downstream countries. Cambodian and Vietnamese officials have raised concerns that fewer reefs upstream could change the flow of water into their countries, posing problems for farming and other activities. The project could also affect fisheries by destroying spawning grounds for fish that live in Cambodia and Vietnam but migrate upriver to lay their eggs. Despite these potential impacts, people in Cambodia and Vietnam have not been consulted.

Surveys in Thailand an indicator of potential impacts

Recent surveys have documented that rapids, shoals and reefs in Thailand that are supposed to be destroyed for the navigation project are crucial for the subsistence livelihoods of local people. The surveys are an indicator of the likely impacts that the navigation project will cause all along the river. The studies have found that local people from Chiang Saen to Chiang Khong rely on riverine plants, such as Mekong seaweed, that grow in the rapids for food and income. The plants, sand dunes, whirlpools and small swamps provide vital spawning ground for Mekong fishes, including the endangered Mekong giant catfish. Blasting of the rapids would destroy important fish habitat and threaten the income and food security of villagers living in the area. Further, villagers living in Huai Luk-Waing Kaen, Thailand, will lose their common customary lands without compensation due to dredging of the shoal. Fishermen in Chiang Saen can no longer use traditional fishing boats due to waves created by large ships. Last summer, the number of fish caught by fishermen along the Thai-Lao border also decreased because implementation of the project altered water levels and currents in the Mekong.

Call for a halt to project until studies completed

Given the impacts outlined above, we respectfully urge the Chinese, Lao, Myanmar and Thai governments to stop all work on the Lancang-Mekong Navigation Channel Improvement Project immediately and ensure that comprehensive environmental and social impact assessments are conducted that will examine potential impacts along the Mekong, from China downstream to Cambodia and Vietnam.

These assessments should be carried out in a transparent and participatory process by a study team selected by government officials, villagers who will be affected by this project and civil society organizations in the Mekong region. The health and vitality of the Mekong River and the lives of those who depend on it deserve nothing less.

the project was delayed this year by the early onset of the rains (see below).

On page 43 we have reproduced the text of the letter signed by Nigel Collar and Brian Sykes to the Minister of Transportation, the Kingdom of Thailand; Minister of Communication, Transport, Post and Construction, Lao People's Democratic Republic; Minister of Communications, People's Republic of China; Minister of Transport, Union of Myanmar.

Rain delays blasting of Mekong rapids

The original plan, set for this year, to blast reefs in the Thai stretch of the Mekong was suspended in May because rising water levels and weather conditions had posed difficulties for the operation. The work to deepen 12 spots, including Kaeng Kai, thereby opening the way for year-round shipping will resume in the dry season next year. The clearance between Myanmar and Laos was completed in April, with China shouldering the entire $5 million cost in a goodwill gesture towards its cash-strapped neighbours. But the project is worrying Cambodia and Vietnam, countries relying heavily on the river for farming and fishing. To allay their fears, the Chinese government signed a data-sharing pact with the Phnom Penh-based Mekong River Commission to provide information on flow and water levels to the countries downstream, in what the MRC called an 'historic agreement'.

Source: *Bangkok Post*, 11 May 2002

Vietnam

Government declares new national park

Cu Yang Sin Natural Reserve in Vietnam's Central Highlands is to be designated a national park. The 59,000 ha reserve is home to almost 1,000 species of plants, 54 of them listed in the Vietnam Red Book for Endangered Species. BirdLife has long recognised the ornithological importance of the reserve and lobbied for its protection. The site was included in BirdLife's protected areas review of Vietnam, and BirdLife helped to draw up an investment plan for the reserve under an EU-funded project.

Source: *World Birdwatch*, 24 (3)

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Status of White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* in Rampur Valley, Nepal

Introduction

The kingdom of Nepal is known to have a diverse avifauna. This is mainly because of the different ecological zones that range from the *terai* lowlands at about 75 m, to the highest peak in the world in the Himalayas. About 852 bird species have been recorded, of which 29 species are identified as globally threatened by BirdLife International.[1] Recent inclusions in the list are two vulture species: White-rumped *Gyps bengalensis* and Slender-billed *Gyps tenuirostris*, thought to be common in the past.

Eight species of vulture have been recorded from Nepal.[2] White-rumped Vulture is reported up to 3,100 m, although it is most common up to about 1,000 m. Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve, Royal Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve and Rampur valley are still stronghold habitats of this species[3,4] (and pers. obs.). Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) biologist Vibhu Prakash[5] documented a 100% decline in the breeding population of White-rumped vultures in Keoladeo National Park, India – from 353 nests in 1987/88 to 150 in 1996/97, 25 in 1997/98 and none in 1999/2000. Although the catastrophic decline and deaths have not been recorded in Nepal, the breeding population is dwindling. Hem Sagar Baral of Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN) says that breeding vultures have completely disappeared from Royal Chitwan National Park, once a breeding stronghold of White-rumped Vulture. This paper presents preliminary findings on population status, perceived threats and prospects for further studies of White-rumped Vulture in Rampur valley, Palpa.

Study Area

Rampur (27°51′80″N & 83°54′24″E) is one of the Village Development Committees of Palpa district. It lies in the western development region of Nepal about 170 km south-west of Pokhara (see Figure 1). It is situated in the transition region of *terai* and middle hill ecological zones at an elevation of 442 m and the meandering Kali Gandaki river flows through the valley. The climate is subtropical and the vegetation is in an early to middle successional stage. The dominant vegetation comprises Simal *Bombax ceiba*, Khair *Acacia catechu*, Karma *Adina cordifolia*, Bel *Aegle marmelos*, Mango *Mangifera indica*, Kamuno *Cleistocalyx operculata*, Kali Katha *Aporusa octandra* and Budho-dhayar *Lagerstromia parviflora*.

Methodology

The first census was carried out from 1–3 May and the second during September 14–16, 2001. The survey was carried out in early mornings (06h30–08h30) and late afternoons (17h00–19h00). All vultures sighted either on roosts or nests were incorporated in the population estimate. Nest searches were conducted and all the nests found were included in the counts. The dominant vegetation of the areas was also recorded and informal discussions were held with local people to gather some socio-ecological information on vultures.

Result and Discussion

Population Status

In the first survey, 60 White-rumped Vultures and 19 nests were recorded from four sites, while in the second survey only 33 vultures and 11 nests were recorded from five sites. The low number in the second survey is due to the fact that Aapchaur, where the highest number of vultures was recorded in the first survey, was not covered in the second survey. Out of 30 nests recorded, nine were in Mango and the rest were in Simal trees. On September 15, 2001 at least 50 vultures were seen on the riverbed of the Kali Gandaki. As we couldn't survey a few places where villagers have reported the vulture, and assuming that we had

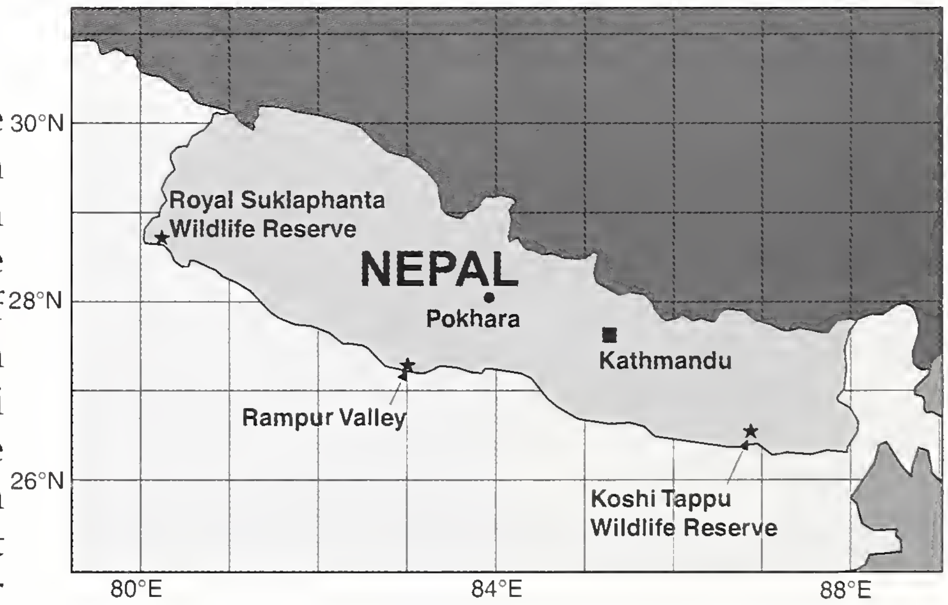
30°N
28°N
26°N
Royal Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve
NEPAL
Pokhara
Kathmandu
Rampur Valley
Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve
80°E
84°E
88°E

Figure 1. Map showing locations mentioned in the text.

missed some, there could be at least 100 birds in the Rampur valley. For more details please refer to Table 1.

Table 1. Population and nests recorded of White-rumped Vulture in Rampur.

	First Survey (May 1–3, 2001)		Second Survey (Sept.14–16, 2001)	
Sites	Nests	Population	Nests	Population
Bankatta	1	2	1	2
Jyagdi	7	14	4	15
Islampur	3	22	3	11
Aapchaur	8	22	*	*
Darchha	*	*	3	5
Total	**19**	**60**	**11**	**33**

* Sites not covered in the surveys

Assuming a population of 100 individuals and given the small area of habitat, the density of White-rumped Vulture was high. Due to its easy access, size of habitat and population density, Rampur valley seems the best site to undertake ecological studies of White-rumped Vulture in Nepal.

Threats

Various factors, including poisoning and the use of pesticides, lack of food and disease, have been suggested as possible causes for high vulture mortality and subsequent population decline.[6] We have cursorily assessed the threats to vultures at this site. During our survey we didn't record any dead vultures or vultures with 'head-drooping' symptoms. During discussions with local people, it came to light that they had never seen any dead vultures, or vultures with any 'head-drooping' symptoms. Munir Virani[4] counted 16 of 109 White-rumped Vultures exhibiting 'head-drooping' and 16 dead vultures in Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve. During a visit in April 2001, vultures were found to be more abundant in the west compared to the east of Nepal.[3] In our opinion, this site is still intact and not infected with the epidemic that has been recorded elsewhere in the subcontinent.

During informal discussions with local people they explained that they didn't kill the vultures for religious reasons, and that sanitation of the area had improved. 'Previously people used to throw dead bodies of cattle here and there but now they use safe disposal methods', said one villager. Despite this, in our brief survey we did observe three carcasses by the riverside. Furthermore, as the Kali Gandaki river is extensively used for cremation, food scarcity is not the problem.

The entire Rampur valley is cultivated and local people use pesticides and chemical fertilisers to increase yields. As vultures thrive mainly in the agro-ecosystem, it would be possible to correlate the impact of pesticides with the reproductive potential of vultures at this site.

The habitat where most of the vultures were recorded is still intact. Some of the sites were amidst villages, which are more vulnerable to anthropogenic activities. Rampur is becoming urbanised and the immigration rate is high. These factors, coupled with a burgeoning population, are leading to habitat destruction or modification, which will become a major threat to the vultures in the future.

Conservation Awareness

In our two brief surveys, the local people were amazed to know that we had came all the way from Pokhara just to watch and study vultures. Due to social stigma the local people were reluctant even to talk about the vultures. They were sceptical when we told them that they were fortunate to have vultures – which are now a treasure in the biological world – in their neighbourhood. As in other parts of Nepal, conservation awareness among stakeholders is lacking in Rampur valley. Awareness campaigns addressing the plight of vultures are urgently needed to help promote the survival strategy for this species at this site.

Conclusions

Cursory surveys in the Rampur valley recorded about 100 White-rumped Vultures. Given the small size of the available habitat, the density of the species is high. The site is still intact and not infected with the epidemic recorded elsewhere in the subcontinent. Hunting and food scarcity are not thought to be threats to the population at present, but habitat destruction or modification may be a major threat in the near future due to urbanisation. Local people should be apprised of this species' importance to their ecosystem, and this should help promote the species' long-term survival. Considering the various requisites for scientific field studies, Rampur appears to be the best site at which to undertake ecological studies on White-rumped Vulture. Monitoring of the population, disease and breeding success is recommended at this site in order to collect background information and so forge an action plan for this species.

Acknowledgements

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Nabin Baral and Ramji Gautam
P.O. Box 907, Kathmandu, Nepal

Captions for photos on opposite page

1. White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis*. Photo by Tim Loseby

2 &3. Bruijn's Brush-turkey *Aepypodius bruijnii*, probably female; the first photograph of a living bird of this species, Doom (Sorong), Papua, Indonesia, 12 August 2002. Photos by Kris Tindige (Papua Bird Club). See page 40 for details.

4. The new OBC T-shirt - see page 5.

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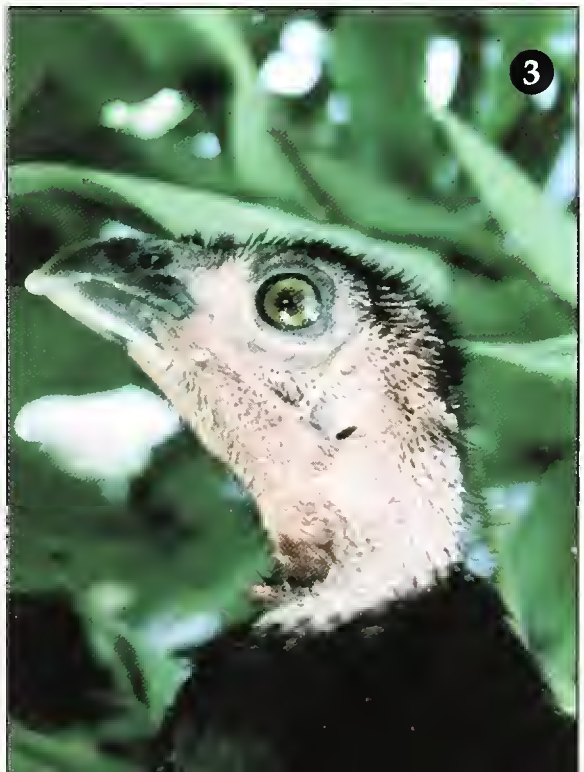
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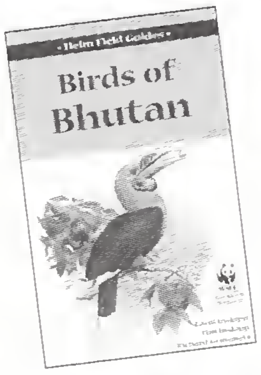

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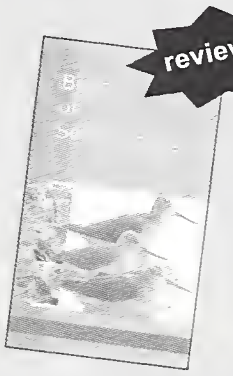

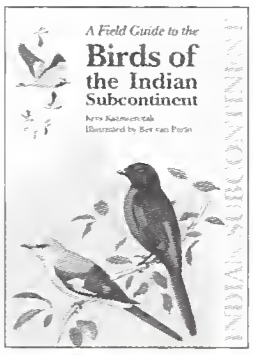

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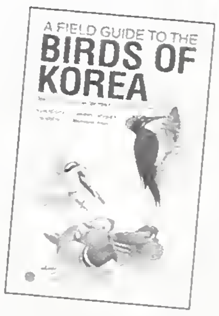

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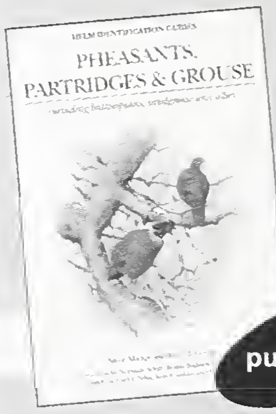

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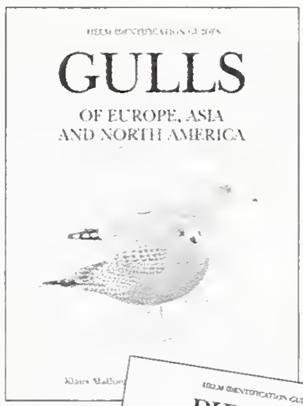

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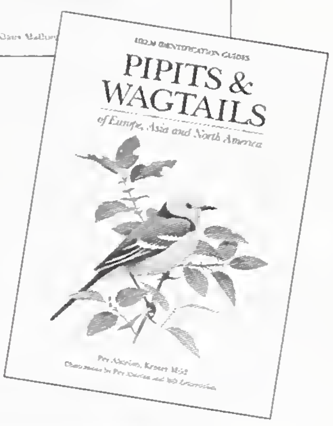

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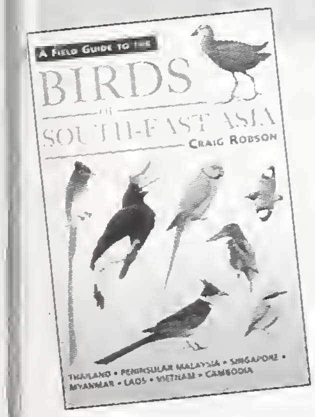

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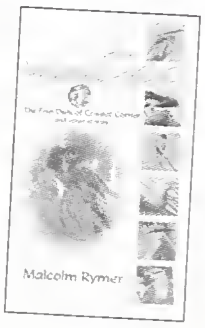

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Hume's Groundpecker *Pseudopodoces humilis*: the smallest corvid or the largest tit?

Hume's Groundpecker *Pseudopodoces humilis* was described by Hume in 1871[1] with the generic name *Podoces* (and a puzzling 'Chough-Thrush' as the English equivalent) along with another new species, Mongolian Ground-jay *Podoces hendersoni*, which is still in the original genus. *Podoces* now consists of four species commonly called, not without reason,[2] the ground-jays. Although *Podoces* and *Pseudopodoces* may share non-corvine features,[3] the true ground-jays possess many more corvid traits, and thus the assumption of a close relationship with them has obscured the non-corvid peculiarities of Hume's Groundpecker.[4] In a short monograph pointing to *Pseudopodoces* as a non-corvid genus, Borecky[5] only hesitantly suggested an alternative affinity with the starlings. Thus constrained by tradition, and the lack of reliable alternatives, taxonomists have long kept this barely 20 cm-long, ground-dwelling bird of grassy and stony plateaux of Tibet and adjoining regions, within the corvids. This opinion has mainly been based on morphology, although ethology has recently been used in support.[6] The first molecular comparison, however, coupled with an osteological study,[7] has placed Hume's Groundpecker within the tits (Paridae).

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I observed Hume's Groundpecker on many occasions during a tour through Qinghai, Gansu, and Sichuan provinces of China, and I tried to explain some morphological and behavioural traits of this species.[8] Several features seemed non-corvine to me: the stocky appearance, flimsy tail, upright stance with legs forward (rather than breast forward as in corvids), and fluttering flight (a fledgling-like flight following Schäfer[9]). At that time, however, I thought of these peculiarities as being due to Hume's Groundpecker's bouncing gait and burrowing habits, which are unusual features among the corvids, but do occur, separately and in less extreme forms. Now it is apparent that all the features above are better explained by assuming a phylogenetic relationship with the tits. Moreover, birds in a foraging group (see Figure 2) showed a posture that much resembles a version of the wing-raised posture of a tit threatening over food (compare with Figure B on p267 in Cramp and Perrins 1993[10]). I have found no correspondence in corvids with this display, which was performed by birds hopping about and involved wings held a little away from the body, tail somewhat raised and fanned, and body upright, with the plumage of the nape and back ruffled. The few fairly contrasting parts of Hume's Groundpecker plumage, the lighter-coloured cheeks, nape, and outer rectrices, were all displayed. Although Amadon[11] and Goodwin[12] pointed to the darker plumage, seeing *Podoces*-like markings in obsolescent form, the lighter plumage suggests a recurrent trait of the tits.

Concerning the most striking of Hume's Groundpecker peculiarities, the extraordinarily long bounces birds make on the ground, I have only still images for moving subjects. However, I compared these photographs with frames of videotaped sequences of the hopping gaits of a Coal Tit *Parus ater* and of a Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* on the ground. I found more similar body positions in the tit, whose legs, compared with the jay's, showed reduced movement in the thigh and crus (relative to the foot). Thus the tit's gait appeared rather 'stiff', just as Ali and Ripley[13] characterise the gait of Hume's Groundpecker. I maintain that the bouncing gait of this species may be a special, antipredatory adaptation[8] because the jumps are much longer than in tits and jumping is often interrupted by complete immobilisation of the bird. But I add that the origin may be in the hopping of tit-like ancestors.

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Tiziano Londei, Dipartimento di Biologia, Università degli Studi, Via Celoria 26, 20133 Milano, Italy.
E-mail: londeit@tin.it

Captions for photos on opposite page

1. Hume's Groundpecker *Pseudopodoces humilis* Koko Nor, Tibet, 29 July 2002. Photo by Simon Colenutt

2. Foraging Hume's Groundpeckers *Pseudopodoces humilis* (Lake Qinghai, 11 August 1996). The bird in the middle is probing in the mud, while the two others are displaying as tits do over food.

Wetlands:
Korea's most-threatened habitat

South Korea lacks endemic bird species, and is rather poor in terms of avian 'dry land' diversity compared with other East Asian countries, but its wetlands and waterways are extremely important for the future conservation of migratory waterbird species, around 13 of which are globally threatened, and for the future well-being of the human population. Its extensive tidal-flats support three charismatic and threatened near-endemic breeding species (Saunders's Gull *Larus saundersi*, Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes*, and Black-faced Spoonbill *Platelea minor*) and a very significant percentage of the East Asian Australasian Flyway's shorebirds. Rivers, reclamation lakes and rice-fields support more than 1 million migrant and overwintering waterbirds, including most of the world's Baikal Teal *Anas formosa*, White-naped *Grus vipio* and Hooded Cranes *Grus monacha*. Amongst East Asian countries it has one of the richest economies and one of the strongest environmental movements too, boding well for long-term conservation. Yet, presumably as it lacks an international NGO and has not yet received much interest from foreign birders, South Korea still remains something of a relative unknown to the world's conservation and birding communities. This article therefore aims to highlight the importance of Korea's wetlands for migratory bird populations, and give additional information on threats and conservation initiatives.

Geography and Climate

South Korea forms the southern part of the north-south oriented Korean peninsula, lying broadly between 34 and 38 degrees North, and between 126 and 130 degrees East.

It is surrounded by sea on three sides, with the Yellow Sea to the west (bordered by China, North Korea and South Korea, this semi-enclosed shallow sea has an average depth across the whole of only 44 m), the South Sea or 'Tsushima Strait' to the south, and the deep East Sea (or Sea of Japan) to the east. Due to these seas' ameliorating effects, South Korea has elements of both continental and maritime-temperate climates (see Fig. 1).

Winters are generally dry and cold with periods of prolonged subzero temperatures in the north, especially away from the coast, but often milder, wetter conditions in the south, leading to inland rivers freezing in the north but largely unfrozen tidal-flats and coastal reclamation lakes in the south-west and south-east (determining the mid-winter distribution of species such as Saunders's Gull and Baikal Teal). Summers are generally hot and humid (with daily maxima typically above 30°C in the warmest areas), and the heaviest rains usually fall between June and September, either as part of summer monsoons or carried by typhoons. Drought conditions are reasonably frequent, further stretching very limited water resources.

Wetlands

There are two broad categories of wetland supporting significant concentrations of waterbird in South Korea and the food needs of much of the human population: intertidal/tidal and freshwater. Both should be considered global

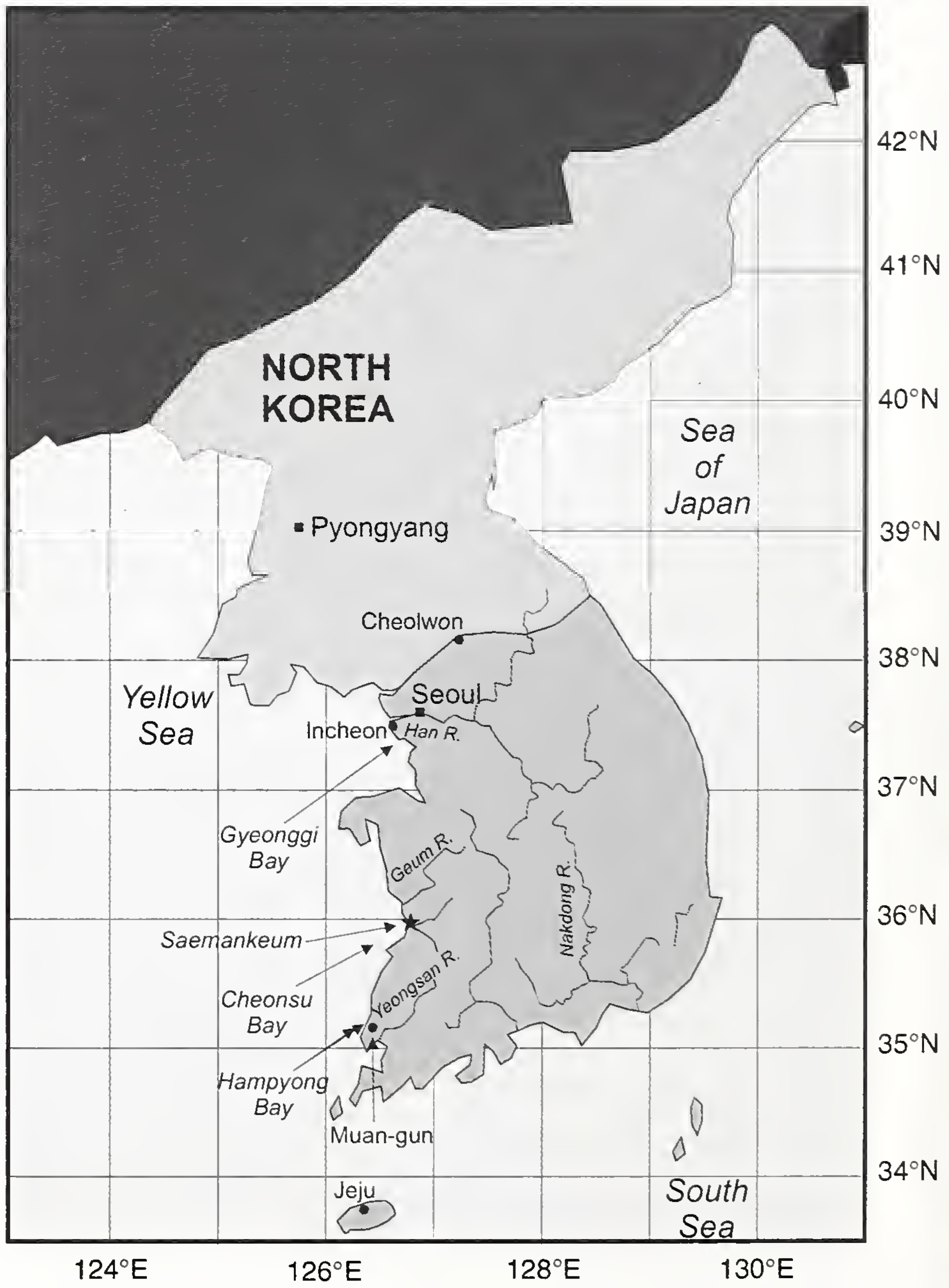


Figure 1. Map showing sites mentioned in the text

conservation priorities. As of 1998, tidal-flats covered approximately 280,000 ha (with most unvegetated, and only small areas supporting *Suaeda* saltmarsh), while the six major flood-plain/coastal plain areas nationwide (five in the west, one in the south-east) now contain most of the freshwater waterbird habitat.

Intertidal Wetlands

Due to differences in coastal slope and tidal-ranges, intertidal wetlands are not distributed evenly around the coast, and approximately 83% of tidal-flats are found along the west coast, with 17% along the south coast. Most major rivers (including the Geum in the west, the Yeongsan in the south-west and the Nakdong in the south-east) have been barraged at their estuaries since the late 1980s, effectively removing the brackish estuarine zone (the clear preference of Black-faced Spoonbills and several species of shorebird), with only the Han now providing substantial brackish and freshwater tidal zones. Here, despite the proximity of Seoul, such habitat still supports small numbers of wintering White-naped Cranes and up to 1,500 Swan Geese *Anser cygnoides*, especially during migration. In addition, almost all tidal-flats nationwide have extensively developed hinterlands and most are used for intensive shellfish harvesting, further limiting waterbird use. No intertidal areas (at the time of writing) are comprehensively protected or managed for wildlife.

Along the mainly rocky and sand beach east coast, the tidal range reaches only 0.3 m, and with the exception of north-eastern coastal lagoons that support 20–30 over-wintering Mute Swans *Cynus olor*, there are relatively few waterbirds of international importance. The tidal range, however, increases gradually along the south coast, from an average 1 m in the Nakdong estuary in the far south-east to 5 m during spring tides in Mokpo in the south-west, and northward into the Yellow Sea, where it peaks at 9–10 m (one of the world's highest tidal ranges) in the vast Gyeonggi Bay in the north-west. As a result of this tidal range combined with a shallow coastal gradient and heavy sediment deposition (by Korean rivers and also by the Yellow and Yangtze rivers across the other side of the Yellow Sea) extensive and wide tidal-flats stretch southward from Gyeonggi Bay along much of the west coast and in bays and small estuaries along the south coast. Mud and silt flats tend to predominate in the north (preferred by species such as Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*, with several thousand staging in Gyeonggi Bay) while sandier sediments become more typical in the south-west. Remote islands adjacent to Seoul and Incheon cities, especially those near the Demilitarized Zone (or DMZ), are used as breeding sites for most of the world's remaining populations of Chinese Egret, Black-faced Spoonbill and the distinctive 'Eastern' Oystercatcher *Haematopus (ostralegus) osculans*. The same islands are also used by nesting Black-tailed Gulls *Larus crassirostris* and local 'Yellow-legged Gulls', invariably pink-legged, and perhaps better called Mongolian (or Korean?) Gulls *Larus (cachinnans) mongolicus*. At least three temporary Saunders's Gulls colonies have also been found (the first in 1998) in young salt-marsh growing up in embanked areas prior to landfill, at Shiwa, Song Do and Yeongjong. Subzero temperatures in winter can leave foreshores frozen, though sea temperatures remain several degrees above freezing and a range of species remain, including small numbers of Red-crowned Cranes *Grus japonensis* on tidal flats at Ganghwa and Yeong Jong. In the extremely cold winter of 2001 a single flock of 143 Relict Gulls *Larus relictus* was found at Song Do in Incheon, with several smaller flocks elsewhere, presumably having moved southward from even colder northern parts of the Yellow Sea. This count, combined with high Relict Gull counts in autumn from Happy Island, Hebei Province, and November counts elsewhere in the northern Yellow Sea (Paul Holt *in litt.*), strongly suggest that the tidal-flats of the Yellow Sea form the core of this enigmatic gull's winter distribution.

Moving southward, extensive tidal-flats at Asan and Namyang, in southern Gyeonggii Bay, and in Cheonsu Bay have already been largely reclaimed (the latter creating the Seosan reclamation lakes), while massively wide and complex flats still remain at the mouths of the Geum, Mangyeung and Dongjin Rivers.

The c.15,000 ha of tidal-flat at the mouth of the Geum, presently supporting about half of the estimated minimum population of the rather distinctive *osculans* Oystercatcher (with a peak count of 5,700 in January 2001), are still threatened by a proposed reclamation plan. Worse still, the 25 km-wide tidal-flats formed by the other two rivers are already part of the world's largest ongoing coastal reclamation project: Saemankeum.

Recent data (e.g. Barter 2002) suggests the Saemankeum system is the single most important known shorebird site in the whole Yellow Sea, supporting over 100,000 shorebirds at peak times and many more through the year, including e.g. 50,000 Great Knots *Calidris tenuirostris*, c.210

Spoon-billed Sandpipers *Calidris pygmea* and 61 Nordmann's Greenshanks *Tringa guttifer*. In total, probably 25 to 30 species of waterbird are found here in internationally important concentrations, including Black-faced Spoonbill and Chinese Egret on southward migration, and Saunders's Gulls in winter (with a peak of over 600). The 33-km long outer seawall will, if the project is not cancelled, be completed in 2006.

Further south along the coast, in the peninsula's south-west, the extensive largely sandy sediment tidal-flats are comparatively poor for shorebirds, though several sites (such as Hampyong Bay, and Muan-Gun) support concentrations of over 1,000 Terek Sandpipers *Xenus cinereus* and several thousand Kentish Plovers *Charadrius alexandrinus dealbatus*, especially in August.

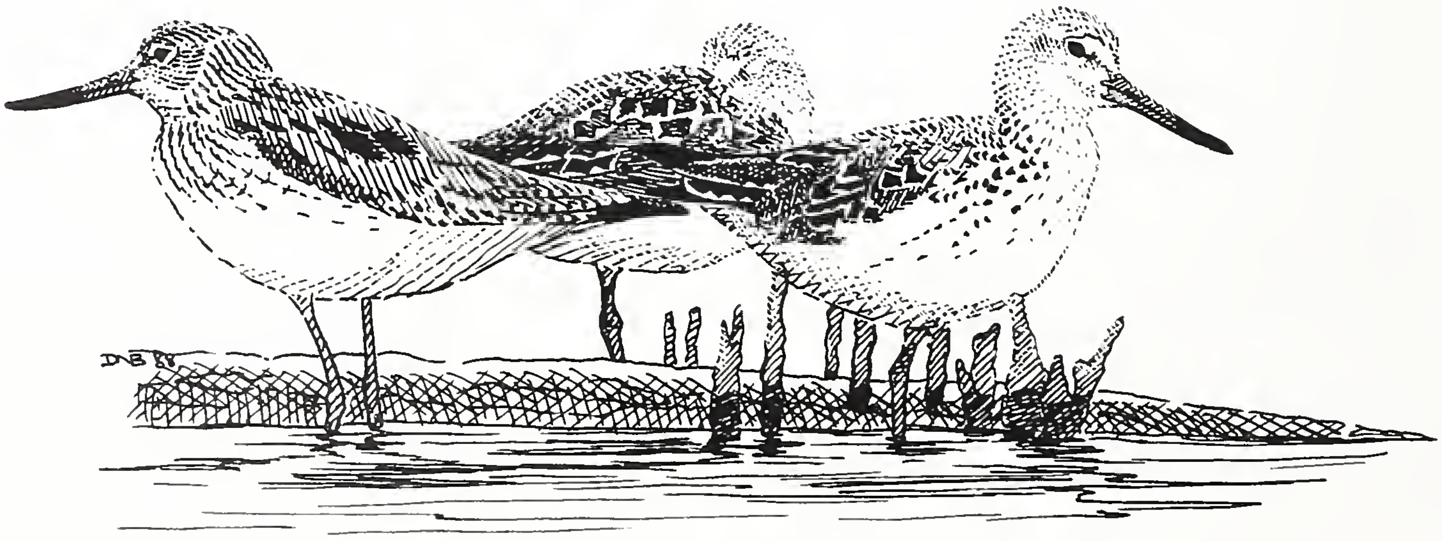
The south coast has a rather more complex topography, consisting of a series of deeper bays fringed by tidal-flats (used by small but significant numbers of Nordmann's Greenshanks on southward migration), as well as extensive areas of mud-rock mix and oyster beds, favouring staging Grey-tailed Tattler *Heteroscelus brevipes* and wintering Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*. There are also two major estuaries, those of the Soemjin River that flows into Gwangyang Bay, and the Nakdong: although remaining habitat at the Nakdong is much more diverse and birds rather more numerous (with peaks of 2,000 Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus* and several thousand Eastern Taiga Bean Geese *Anser fabalis middendorffi*), the industrial Gwangyang Bay now supports between 100 and 200 Black Brant *Branta bernicla nigricans*, the nation's largest remaining flock. In addition, the south coast's milder temperatures allow large numbers of Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* and Saunders's Gull to winter on a number of the remaining tidal-flats: Suncheon Bay alone supports over 15,000 Common Shelduck and 700–1,000 Saunders's Gulls.

Freshwater Wetland

Freshwater wetlands are largely concentrated in the historical floodplains of South Korea's major rivers: the Han in the north-west, the Geum, the Yeongsan, and the Nakdong. Many such areas have been 'extended' in recent years through extensive reclamation of the coastal and intertidal zones, and converted for agriculture and other land uses. Although they support significantly over one million waterbirds in winter (largely on their one million hectares of rice-fields and associated reclamation lakes), they also support the vast majority of South Korea's 47.9 million human population, who live at some of the highest densities found anywhere in the world. As a consequence, few natural or even semi-natural freshwater wetland areas remain outside of the four-kilometre wide DMZ separating the South from the North, and many sites are threatened by continuing degradation and inappropriate management techniques.

Freshwater wetlands can be subdivided into riverine wetlands (typically only semi-natural); remnant areas of natural floodplain wetland (probably totaling less than 10,000 ha nationwide); reclamation lakes; and rice-field (largely flooded between May and July, harvested in September or October, and left dry and bare through the winter, one possible reason for the scarcity of the Grey-headed Lapwing *Vanellus cinereus*, a much more numerous species in milder and wetter Japan).

Although rivers are largely only semi-natural (most are bunded and very disturbed, and support many human activities including extensive water extraction) several support waterbirds in internationally important concentrations (defined in accordance with the



Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* (*left*) and Nordmann's Greenshanks *T. guttifer*
by Dave Bakewell

Ramsar Convention [Iran, 1971] as being either 1% or more of a known population of a species, or 20,000 or more individuals, supported regularly at a site), and several species of Special Conservation Concern. Probably 30–50 Scaly-sided Mergansers *Mergus squamatus* winter most years on rivers, along with significant populations of Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata* (5,000–10,000 are resident nationwide, with up to 5,000 concentrated on Jeju Island in the far south-west in mid-winter). Long-billed Plover *Charadrius placidus* too are reasonably widespread, though the Crested Kingfisher *Megaceryle lugubris*, which is a widespread breeding species across China into Japan, has already effectively become extinct. The few remaining near-natural areas of floodplain wetland, mostly concentrated in the DMZ and in pockets along the Nakdong River, have become increasingly important for a wide variety of species, but most especially cranes. Over 300 each of Red-crowned and White-naped Cranes winter at Cheolwon in the DMZ, and several thousand Hooded and White-naped Cranes stage on their migration, first in the DMZ and then at Gumi, on the Nakdong, on their way to and from Izumi in Kagoshima Prefecture, Japan. The Nakdong also has Korea's only waterbird-important Ramsar site, the 800 ha Woopo wetland, one of 3–4 sites supporting significant numbers of the declining Eastern Taiga Bean Goose. Not surprisingly, several floodplain-dependent species have shown obvious declines, with the Crested Ibis *Nipponia nippon* extinct, and the Oriental Stork *Ciconia boyciana* last breeding in 1980, and now best regarded as a very scarce winter visitor (with 20–25 nationwide most winters). Even the Watercock *Gallicrex cinerea*, once a common and familiar bird in Korea, has suffered very extensive declines and now has a very localised distribution, probably being commonest in very extensive areas of recently created rice-fields made through tidal-flat conversion, e.g. in Seosan and Haenam. Such areas still lack extensive road systems and buildings, and being only recently used for agriculture presumably still have invertebrate-rich soils. Happily, however, some species are increasing through utilising such areas, including most egret species (an effect also of global warming and/or reduced persecution?) and especially the Baikal Teal, which has increased from an estimated 80,000 in 1995 to c.400,000 in 2001/2002. In recently-created habitat in Seosan and Haenam they find safe daytime roosting and extensive rice-fields in which to feed at night.

Conservation Initiatives

Although South Korea is still stubbornly pressing on with many wetland-reclamation projects, dreamed up for the ill-informed National Master Plan for Land Reclamation by the military government of the 1980s, and although so much has already been lost, there is still very much to work for and many increasingly bright signs of progress. There are probably 60 or more sites nationwide still meeting Ramsar criteria for identification as internationally important, and still an estimated 50 species of waterbird supported by South Korean wetlands in internationally important concentrations. Probably 13 of these species are considered globally threatened: Chinese Egret, Black-faced Spoonbill, Swan Goose, Baikal Teal, Mandarin Duck, Hooded, White-naped and Red-crowned Cranes, Eastern Curlew, Nordmann's Greenshank, Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Saunders's

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Captions for plates on pages 58 and 59

1. Demoiselle Crane *Grus virgo*. Photo by Pete Morris.
2. White-naped Crane *Grus vipio* with Hooded Cranes *Grus monacha*. Photo by Pete Morris.
3. Hooded Crane *Grus monacha*. Photo by Pete Morris.
4. Red-crowned Crane *Grus japonensis*. Photo by Pete Morris.
5. Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*. Photo by Pete Morris.
6. Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*. Photo by Pete Morris.
7. Grey-headed Lapwing *Vanellus cinereus*. Photo by Pete Morris.
8. Black-tailed Gull *Larus crassirostris*. Photo by Pete Morris.
9. Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*. Photo by Tom Tarrant.
10. Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* Photo by Tim Loseby.
11. Baikal Teal *Anas formosa*. Photo by Tim Loseby.
12. Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*. Photo by Tim Loseby.
13. Crested Ibis *Nipponia nippon* Photo by Xi Zhinong / BP plc.
14. Grey-tailed Tattler *Heteroscelus brevipes*. Photo by Pete Morris.
15. Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer* (right), with Curlew Sandpiper *Calidis ferruginea* and Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii* (left). Photo by Ray Tipper.
16. Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes*. Photo by Pete Morris.

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Captions are on page 57

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Gull and Relict Gull. In addition, there are at least three threatened populations (Mute Swan, Black Brant and *eastern* Oystercatcher) not listed by the Asia Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy that occur regularly in internationally important concentrations in Korea. What of these species' future?

With a strengthening economy and a growing international role, South Korea has started to shift its wetland policies noticeably in recent years, cancelling the massive Yeongsan reclamation project in 1998 (which would have led to the eventual loss of most of the important south-west tidal-flats), and is starting to respond to the demands of international conventions such as Ramsar and the Convention on Biological Diversity. Although still only designating two Ramsar sites, both a Wetlands Conservation Act (in 1999) and a Natural Environment Conservation Act have been introduced, and the Ministries of Environment and of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (who carry the largest responsibility for wetlands under national legislation) have voiced their public opposition to coastal reclamation, while working to designate national Wetland Protection Areas (at the time of writing, unsuccessfully, due to local stakeholder opposition). Further government-led initiatives include increased participation in the Site Network activities (carried out as part of the Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy), and also participation in bilateral bird conservation talks with neighbouring Japan. A series of other major projects are also ongoing, including two full-scale UNDP-GEF projects (one covering the Yellow Sea; the other the Tumen River and regional catchment), and one further South Korean Wetlands Biodiversity Project, still in its Project Development Phase B.

In addition, although still extremely small scale, there have been some recent moves made at local sites towards altering management regimes in individual rice-fields (allowing some to remain flooded in winter for waterbird use, e.g. Lee H. 2001), and the start of a nationwide scheme covering c.1,000 ha at five sites to subsidise farmers to manage their rice-fields for biodiversity.

The recent shift in government stance has been assisted by a growing interest in birds and their conservation, fuelled by the media and the rapid increase in the popularity of birdwatching: though still small scale, there are now believed to be an estimated 1,000 or more birdwatchers nationwide.

Domestic NGOs have started to become involved in bird surveys (participating in Ministry of Environment organised and funded waterbird surveys), and some are increasingly starting to cite bird protection as a reason for opposing reclamation and developments affecting wetlands. Through the same domestic wetland conservation work, some are even participating in international conservation initiatives, working with Japanese and Chinese NGOs.

South Korea really is a worthy conservation cause. After eventual unification of the Korean peninsula, expertise and conservation experience built up now in the South will be of great value for the resource-stretched North. The DMZ and much of the Yellow Sea will increasingly become Korea's responsibility. The future of charismatic bird species, and the well-being of a huge human population, will very largely depend on the wetland 'wise use' management techniques and conservation initiatives developed now.

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Nial Moores, No. 1207, 101 Dong, Samik Daeyeon Beach Apart 1808, Daeyeon 3-Dong, nam-Gu, Busan Coty, South Korea

From the Field

Compiled by Craig Robson

These are largely unconfirmed records covering the period from May 2001–August 2002. We urge that if they have not already done so, contributors provide full details to the relevant regional organisations in due course.

BHUTAN

A long overdue new species for the country, **Rusty-bellied Shortwing** *Brachypteryx hyperythra* was tracked-down north of Phuntsholing (2,040 m), where three birds were seen on 22nd April (PHo *et al.*/Sunbird). Recent vagrants have included three **Pintail Snipe** *Gallinago stenura* near Thimphu on 8th April (DF *et al.*/Birdquest), whilst eight **Spot-winged Starlings** *Saroglossa spiloptera* by the roadside 49 km south of Tongsa (1,130 m) on 20th April (DF *et al.*/Birdquest) were also noteworthy. Also of great interest were **Long-billed Wren Babblers** *Rimator malacoptilus* along the lower Lingmethang Road, much further east and at higher elevation than was previously documented for the country. One was heard on 16th April (DF *et al.*/Birdquest), two were seen at another site (c.1,960 m) on 18th April (PHo *et al.*/Sunbird), and another seen at a third site (2,000 m) the same day (DF *et al.*/Birdquest). Minor range extensions came with sightings of **Chestnut-winged Cuckoo** *Clamator coromandus* along the Mo Chu north of Punakha (1,600 m) on 10th April (DF *et al.*/Birdquest), at least six **Solitary Snipe** *Gallinago solitaria* near Paro and another four near Thimphu on 8th April (DF *et al.*/Birdquest), and two **Yellow-browed Warblers** *Phylloscopus inornatus* in a bird-wave along the Mo Chu on 10th April (DF *et al.*/Birdquest). A single **Orange-headed Thrush** *Zoothera citrina* by the roadside near Jakar (at 2,700 m) on 12th April (DF *et al.*/Birdquest) was at extremely high elevation. Also of note was a flock of 70 **Speckled Wood Pigeons** *Columba hodgsonii* along the Lingmethang Road on 14th April (DF *et al.*/Birdquest).

CAMBODIA

Following on from last year's reconnaissance survey, specific **Bengal Florican** *Houbaropsis bengalensis* searches were conducted between January and mid-May 2002 to ascertain the presence of the species at all consistently reported sites with suitable habitat. In total, 117–160 birds were recorded from 14 sites in three provinces, with no less than 45–65 birds at a single site spanning the Siem Reap-Kompong Thom provincial border, confirming suspicions that this endangered species occurs throughout the north-eastern margin of the Tonle Sap inundation zone. With much suitable habitat still unsurveyed, this strongly suggests that the Tonle Sap inundation zone supports the largest and single most important population of the species left in the world. In the north-west, the most interesting record during a brief visit to eastern Boeng Per Wildlife Sanctuary was of 16 **Comb Ducks** *Sarkidiornis melanotis* at Tropeang Lavea Pram on 26th March; this rare duck was so far known from only two sites in the country, Tonle Sap and Ang Tropeang Thmor (CP,PB *et al.*). An eclipse female **White-winged Duck** *Cairina scutulata* and two ducklings were caught by a soldier on a river close to Mlu Prey village, Preah Vihear on 25th September (per CP) and, although confiscated, they all subsequently died. Three to six **White-winged Ducks** were also recorded along the O'Scach River within the Chendar Plywood Concession, Choam Ksan District on 17th–18th January (TS,SC), and a single bird was seen along the O'Koki River during the first week of April (CC,GT,SP). Single **Red-headed Vultures** *Sarcogyps calvus* were seen in Preah Vihear on 12th and 14th March (DF *et al.*) and there were three **White-rumped Vultures** *Gyps bengalensis*, and one or two **Manchurian Reed Warblers** *Acrocephalus tangorum* there during the first week of March (PH,DWi). There were a number of interesting reports from Ang Tropeang Thmor Sarus Crane Reserve, Banteay Meanchey. A single **Milky Stork** *Mycteria cinerea* was feeding with **Painted Storks** *M. leucocephala* on 20th August 2001, but more unusual were nine **Sarus Cranes** *Grus antigone* c.15 km south of the reservoir on 23rd August 2001 (CP); the first time they have been found lagging behind so late into the rainy season in the area (usually they have all gone by early July). In January–February, **Spot-billed Pelicans** *Pelecanus philippensis* remained at the site in significant numbers, with a high count of 400 birds on 8th February (ATTCT). This unusual presence well into the breeding season is likely linked to repeated egg collection in Prek Toal, Tonle Sap. On 2nd March the population of **Sarus Cranes** at the site numbered at least 284 birds. Florican surveys conducted in the Siem Reap grasslands (FG,PB,SV) during 26th February–12th April discovered that **Painted Stork** was common in the western part of the survey area, with near-daily records of up to 220 birds feeding at ponds, and a total of 12 **Woolly-necked Storks** *Ciconia episcopus* were observed at scattered sites. An independent report of potentially great significance concerns two pairs of **White-shouldered Ibises** *Pseudibis davisoni* seen flying into rice paddies by the main road in Siem Reap, towards dusk on 18th January (CB,LT). Unfortunately the locality was only very vaguely reported. Two visits to Veal Srangai/ Reang Tey, 10–20 km west of Krous Kraom, produced some very significant finds; single **White-shouldered Ibises** (almost certainly two separate individuals) were found at small pools on 5th and 6th April, and the first field records of **Baillon's Crake** *Porzana pusilla* were made, with a single adult on 4th and 7th April. The area also supports **Bengal Florican**, with 23–26 birds (mostly males) counted during 3rd–8th April, and at least four **Grey-headed Fish Eagles** *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus* were seen. A juvenile **Mountain Hawk Eagle** *Spizaetus nipalensis* was found for sale at Anlong Veng Market, Oddar Meanchey, and brought back to Siem Reap by MSF staff. The weakened bird was fed and given flight exercises, and successfully released south of the town on 29th April (ROv). Also of interest were **Peaceful Doves** *Geopelia striata* at the edge of the last village south of Sor Sosdom on 26th February (FG *et al.*), in Rovieng Village, and also feeding on Route 6 just west of Puork District town on 27th June 2002 (PD,PB,SS). On 3rd May 2002, the species was found along the Stung Chas, towards the Tonle Sap flood zone (FG), the first record from Battambang Province. It was previously only known from Banteay Meanchey Province. In Kompong Thom, single **Oriental Plovers** *Charadrius veredus* flew over the Kruos Kraom area on 20th and 27th February, three landed in a recently ploughed field there on 3rd April (PD,HC,SS), and a flock of seven was discovered in Stung District on 24th March (JE,SKH,KL). **Manchurian Reed Warblers** *Acrocephalus tangorum* were found at Veal Srangai/Reang Tey, 10–20 km west of Kruos Kraom in early April, and small numbers in Stung District, between late January and 10th May 2002, provided several new locality records, and further weight to the developing theory that the species has a widespread wintering distribution along the north-eastern margin of the Tonle Sap. **House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* has finally arrived in Battambang, where pairs were discovered at three localities, Thmar Koul, Battambang town's Psar Leu Market, and Battambang Airport on 19th, 20th and 21st January respectively (RZ). Three **Pompadour Green Pigeons** *Treron pompadora* just west of Molu Prey during 15th–18th January (ND,UT), and single male **Violet Cuckoos** *Chrysococcyx xanthorhynchus* in Preah Vihear on 14th and 16th March (DF), were both apparently the first from northern Cambodia. In the north-east, probably the find of the year so far involved the discovery of an extant population of **White-shouldered Ibises** in Siem Pang District, Stung Treng, where six to ten birds were observed north and west of Siem Pang town during 19th–21st May 2002 (JT,SKH,PB *et al.*). Local people reported the occurrence of flocks of 10–15 during the December rice harvest each year; the most significant number of this critically endangered species to have been seen anywhere since Sam Veasna obtained video footage of a flock of 12 in Kompong Thom in 1999. Additional species of importance recorded during 19th–23rd May 2002, included a lone **Giant Ibis** *Pseudibis gigantea* flying along the Sekong River north of Siem Pang town and a single **Red-headed Vulture** over the Sekong River. On a trip to Koh Ker on 20th–22nd April a single **Giant Ibis** was flushed from a pond along the road about 10 km south of Siyang, Kulen District (FG,NN,SV). A visit to the Phnom Kus area along the Mondolkiri provincial border in Kratie Province, from 8th–14th February, revealed it to be another important area for large waterbirds. A minimum of four **Giant Ibises** were seen, at least two **Sarus Cranes** heard, and up to 12 **Lesser Adjutants** *Leptoptilos javanicus* and up to 18 **Woolly-necked Storks** counted (PB,OR *et al.*). In addition, three **Green Peafowl** *Pavo muticus* and a single **Grey-headed Fish Eagle** were recorded during the survey. Two call-count surveys in the Samling Logging Concession, south Mondolkiri Province, during 15th February–2nd April, recorded 138–182 and 36–48 **Green Peafowls** respectively, a very encouraging number in what must be one of its last strongholds in the world. In addition, these surveys recorded three **Giant Ibises** in three locations, one **Black-necked Stork** *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*, 18 **Lesser Adjutants**, and nine **Woolly-necked Storks**. Perhaps most interesting was the discovery of two adult **White-rumped Vultures** perched close to two nests in late February. Local guides reported that the birds bred in December, when there were four or five nests in the vicinity. Other noteworthy

Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* by Craig Robson

observations included **Pin-tailed Green Pigeon** *Treron apicauda* on the edge of Sen Monorom Plateau, and a pair of **Asian Pied Starlings** *Sturnus contra* by the Samling camp in March (all TS *et al.*). A single **Greater Sand Plover** *Charadrius leschenaultii* along the Mekong River between Stung Treng town and a point c.30 km downstream between 3rd and 8th September 2001 (PD *et al.*) was perhaps the first documented inland record, and a single **Long-tailed Shrike** *Lanius schach* at Stung Treng airfield on 7th September (PD *et al.*) was only the third national record, and the first from the north-east. In the south-east, at Basset Marshes, the most noteworthy single species counts on 21st April were 1,100 **Cotton Pygmy-geese** *Nettapus coromandelianus* and c.1,000 **Little Cormorants** *Phalacrocorax niger* (CP,ROu,TE,TC), the highest counts for the country to date. The AWC annual count there on 13th January recorded 139 **Pheasant-tailed Jacanas** *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* (possibly the highest count on record), as well as 15+ **White-browed Crakes** *Porzana cinerea* (PB,HC,MO,ROu,CP). In Takeo, waterbirds flying out of the Prey Russey Pagoda roost on 6th January included 1,960 **Cattle Egrets** *Bubulcus ibis*, another new national high count (SKH *et al.*). In the natural floodplain bordering Vietnam in Koh Andet District, the **Sarus Crane** total peaked at 173 on 26th February and more significantly, two male **Bengal Floricans** were seen there on 30th March, the first records from the south-east for 74 years (SKH *et al.*). A **Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea* colony with 155 nests and 250 adults and chicks at Prey Preuksa Pagoda, 29 km south of Takeo town, on 10th November (SKH,CP,TT,PB,EB), was the first to be found away from Tonle Sap and provided the largest national count to date. An **Asian Emerald Cuckoo** *C. maculatus* in the grounds of Phnom Tamao Zoo on 6th January may be the first from southern Cambodia, and an **Oriental White-eye** *Zosterops palpebrosus* reported from Koh Andet District on 4th–6th January would, if confirmed, be the first from south-east Cambodia. Around Tonle Sap, the first documented Cambodian breeding record of **Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo* came from Prek Toal, where over 200 birds were counted at nests from mid November onwards (FG). A count for AWC was carried out at Prek Toal on 17th February, but rough conditions on the lake resulted in relatively lower numbers of large waterbirds than in previous years. The totals for key species from boat-based and colony counts included 1,332 **Spot-billed Pelicans**, 1,305 **Painted Storks**, 2,467 **Asian Openbills** *Anastomus oscitans*, and 84 **Lesser Adjutants** (FG). Two more waterbird-counting exercises along the core area's lakeshore were conducted on 15th and 29th May 2002, when large numbers of shorebirds in full breeding plumage were refuelling during their northward migration. 212 **Spotted Redshanks** *Tringa erythropus* (15th only) and 435 & 270+ **Black-tailed Godwits** *Limosa limosa* (the highest counts of these two species for the country) were noted, as well as a record count of 1,030 **Purple Swamphens** *Porphyrio porphyrio* on 15th (FG,SV,LK,PTCT). Perhaps the most interesting record in this region was that of three **Masked Finfoot** *Heliopais personata* chicks (out of a brood of five swimming with a parent) caught by local fishermen on 30th September, all of which died within three days (FG). This is the first confirmed breeding in South-East Asia away from S Myanmar. A single **Masked Finfoot** was also reported from the northern edge of Boeng Chhma during 25th–27th May 2002 (SV, LK), but the absence of a field description unfortunately prevents evaluation of the record. Two **River Lapwings** *Vanellus duvaucelii* flying up the Tonle Sap River at Kandal on 22nd June 2002 (PD) provided only the second record away from the rivers of the north-east. A single **Woolly-necked Stork** was seen near Prek Toal village on 29th December (RZ) and, more significantly, two fledglings of the species were collected from a nest by fishing people in the core area on 10th May 2002, the first breeding record from Tonle Sap (PTCT). In the south-west, at Ocheuteal Beach, Sihanoukville, three **Christmas Island Frigatebirds** *Fregata andrewsi* were seen on 2nd July 2001 (DJ). Two **Woolly-necked Storks** and four **Black-necked Storks** were reported from the Areng Valley, Koh Kong during FFI surveys in February/March (JD per RP). A single **Ruddy Kingfisher** *Halcyon coromanda* was heard calling from one of Koh Tang's satellite islands, near Sihanoukville on 16th March; apparently only the second recent record from Cambodia (PD *et al.*). The second and third Cambodian records of **Tiger**

Shrike *Lanius tigrinus* came with a single along the road to the waterfall, Sihanoukville on 24th August 2001 (DJ), and one on the Bokor Plateau, Bokor National Park on 26th March (DF).

CHINA

A visit to Yunnan during February–March (JHo,TF,RJ,SJ) turned-up an apparent new species for China, **Dark-rumped Swift** *Apus acuticauda*. 10–11 birds were seen well at Yunfengshan on 7th March. Four **Eurasian Siskins** *Carduelis spinus* at Dali (c.2,500 m) on 21st March were apparently the first from Yunnan, as were a number of Chestnut Bulbuls *Hypsipetes castanonotus* at Xishan, with two on 27th February, one the next day, and two on 2nd March (probably just two individuals involved). There had apparently been six there on 2nd January (SB pers. comm.). Other good observations in the Kunming area included a calling **Brown Hawk Owl** *Ninox scutulata* at Xishan on 26th February, and a single **Booted Eagle** *Hieraaetus pennatus* in Kunming itself on 24th March. At Ruili, west Yunnan, 1–2 **Banded Bay Cuckoos** *Cacomantis sonneratii* were found daily on 13th and 15th–17th March, a single **Swinhoe's Snipe** *Gallinago megala* on 12th March, six **Small Pratincoles** *Glareola lactea* on 11th and 58 on 12th March, a single five-plus calendar-year **Greater Spotted Eagle** *Aquila clanga* on 12th March, a **Chinese Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus sichuanensis* on 14th and 1–2 (in nearly the same spot) on 17th March, two singing **Yellow-vented Warblers** *P. cantator* on 13th and another heard only on 15th March (there are few confirmed Chinese records, all from Yunnan), and small numbers of **Omei Warblers** *Seicercus omeiensis*. In the Gaoligong Shan, the same observers found 12 **Black-faced Warblers** *Abroscopus schisticeps* at Shibaoshan on 22nd March (perhaps the first from east of the Salween River in Yunnan), and wintering **Ferruginous Ducks** *Aythya nyroca*, with 12 at a reservoir in the Tengchong area on 10th March, and an impressive 330+ at Lashiba Lake, Lijiang on 18th March, were also noteworthy. The only news of note received from Beidaihe, Hebei was of a single **Parasitic Jaeger** *Stercorarius parasiticus* on 24th September (PHo *et al.*/Sunbird). Spring 2002 highlights at Happy Island, Hebei (JHo) included a **Black-winged Cuckooshrike** *Coracina melaschistos* on 15th May, a second calendar-year male **Chinese Blue Flycatcher** *Cyornis (rubeculoides) glaucicomans* on 10th May, the second from the Hebei coast, and a bedraggled **Common Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita* on 14th May. Good numbers of **Baikal Teal** *Anas formosa* were present in north-east China in late autumn 2001 (PHo *et al.*/Sunbird), with 700 at Shuangtai Hekou NNR, Liaoning on 15th October, 359 at Huairou Reservoir, Beijing on 4th November, and 60 at Yu Qiao Reservoir, Tianjin on 5th November. The former location also held 1,317 **Saunders's Gulls** *Larus saundersi* on 15th October, while 559 **Relict Gulls** *Larus relictus* south of Tanggu, Tianjin on 5th September 2001 and 784 there the next day (PHo *et al.*/Sunbird) were also very impressive. Several **White-backed Woodpeckers** *Dendrocopos leucotos* and up to four singing **Large-billed Leaf Warblers** *Phylloscopus magnirostris* were found at Wulingshan, Xinglong County, Hebei (PH *et al.*/Sunbird) in May/June 2001 & 2002 (the former also in September 2000). Also of interest in the north-east were a juvenile **Lesser White-fronted Goose** *Anser erythropus* at Miyun Reservoir, Beijing on 2nd, 3rd and 9th November (PHo/Sunbird), a singing territorial male **Grey-backed Thrush** *Turdus hortulorum* at Zushan Forest Park (Old Peak), Hebei on 21st May 2002 (PHo et al./Sunbird), and up to five **Reed Parrotbills** *Paradoxornis heudei* at Nandagang, Hebei in September (PHo/Sunbird).

Relict Gulls *Larus relictus* by Nik Borrow (Courtesy of Birdquest)

INDIA

More interesting records have been received from Malda District, West Bengal (AS). On 1st January, at Sagardighi Fishery, there were at least 1,500 **Fulvous Whistling-ducks** *Dendrocygna bicolor*, 20 **Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*, eight **White-rumped Vultures** *Gyps bengalensis* (after a long absence), four **Black-headed Ibises** *Threskiornis melanocephalus*, and an **Asian Brown Flycatcher** *Muscicapa dauurica*.

A visit to Farakka Barrage and its adjacent Ganges chars between 10th–12th January turned-up 3,000+ **Fulvous Whistling-ducks**, a startling 8,000+ **Red-crested Pochards** *Netta rufina*, 600+ **Common Pochards** *Aythya ferina*, and 25,000+ **Tufted Ducks** *A. fuligula*, 35 **Pied Avocets** *Recurvirostra avosetta*, 10 **Brown-headed Gulls**

Larus brunnicephalus, seven **Black-headed Ibises** and two **Lesser Adjutants** *Leptoptilos javanicus*. At Ahiron wetlands, Mursidabad District, West Bengal, the same observer counted 5,000+ **Cotton Pygmy-geese** *Nettapus coromandelianus*, 60 **Ferruginous Ducks** *A. nyroca*, and 25 **Brown-headed Gulls** on 8th January. During an expedition to the Sunderbans Delta for a shark study with a National Geographic (USA) team, during 5th–29th April, **Ruddy Kingfisher** *Halcyon coromanda* was found in both the Sunderbans Biosphere Reserve and Sunderbans Tiger Reserve, and **Lesser Adjutant** was also found in the Sunderbans TR buffer zone (AS). During a birdwatching trip to Buxa Tiger Reserve, Jalpaiguri, West Bengal on 16th–20th February (AS), **Greater Yellownape** *Picus flavinucha* and **White-capped Water Redstart** *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus* were observed, while **Lammergeier** *Gyps barbatus*, **Himalayan Griffon** *Gyps himalayensis*, **Long-tailed Broadbill** *Psarisomus dalhousiae* and **Spotted Nutcracker** *Nucifraga caryocatactes* were seen at Buxa Fort on 19th February.

Surveys in the previously unexplored Gulma Valley of Mahananda Wildlife Sanctuary, Darjeeling District, West Bengal during 8th–14th February (AS) turned up the following interesting species: **Black-necked Stork** *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*, **Lesser Adjutant**, at least 25 **Black Ibises** *Pseudibis papillosa* near the Gulma River on 9th, **Long-tailed Broadbill**, **Hill Blue Flycatcher** *Cyornis banyumas*, **Brahminy Starling** *Sturnus pagodarum*, **Hill Myna** *Gracula religiosa*, and **Black-crested Bulbul** *Pycnonotus melanicterus*. In Meghalaya early this year (ND), a pair of **Hodgson's Frogmouths** *Batrachostomus hodgsoni* reacted to accidental tape-playback of the species' calls at Shillong Peak on 9th March. Also at this site were a male **Purple Cochoa** *Cochoa purpurea* on 11th February, and a single **Grey-sided Thrush** *Turdus feae* in the same fruiting tree the following day. A single **Jerdon's Baza** *Aviceda jerdoni* at Ratzol, near Jatinga, North Cachar on 4th March (ND) was also unusual. In the north, interesting recent sightings at Asan Barrage, Dehra Dun Valley, included a single female **Comb Duck** *Sarkidiornis melanotos* and up to six **Lesser Whistling-ducks** *Dendrocygna javanica* on 24th–25th June 2002 (ASi). Two **Indian Pittas** *Pitta brachyura* at Pithora, Chhattisgarh District, Madhya Pradesh on 20th May 2002 (RK) provided a slight range extension, while two rarities were found in the South Andamans, a **Sanderling** *Calidris alba* on Beach 7, Havelock Island on 28th February (perhaps only the second record), and at least three **Red-rumped Swallows** *Hirundo daurica* at the same locality during 27th February–3rd March (Apr).

MALAYSIA

Peninsular Malaysia

Following reports of a strange falcon, a subadult (probably female) **Amur Falcon** *Falco amurensis* was observed and photographed at Sg Balang ricefields, Batu Pahat, Johor on 3rd February (GN), the first to have been found in Malaysia (see page 68 for photos). Sightings of a subadult (probably male) **Eurasian Hobby** *Falco subbuteo* on 26th January at Belum (800 m elevation), Perak, and again the following day on the eastern side of the main range divide, and a **Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo* in the same area on 26th and 31st January (c.1,000 m), provided range and elevation limit extensions for both species in Peninsular Malaysia (GN,DY). Up to 30 active nests of **Lesser Adjutant** *Leptoptilos javanicus*, with juveniles at varying degrees of development, were discovered on the outskirts of Batu Pahat town, Johor, on 2nd March (MP). With the nests situated in Pulai trees in an overgrown rubber estate area, this is the largest single colony found in recent years in Peninsular Malaysia (probably since the 1930s). A single **Spoon-billed Sandpiper** *Calidris pygmeus* was found at the coastal power station, Kapar, Selangor in a large flock of **Red-necked Stints** *C. ruficollis* on 3rd February (OTP), and was still present on 17th February (GN). A visit to Pulau Tioman (SR) turned-up a male **Common Stonechat** *Saxicola torquata* at Tekek Airport on 13th March, the first record from the island. On Pulau Tulai, off Tioman, the same observer found a single **Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea* on 12th March, and most notably, a **Great-billed Heron** *Ardea sumatrana* on 4th and 17th June 2002. During an 80 minute period, 718 hornbills passed over low in groups (some stopping briefly to perch) at Temengor Forest Reserve (580 m), Perak on 19th November. Those identified were all **Plain-pouched Hornbill** *Aceros subruficollis* (GN). Until the early 1990's, this species was not known from Peninsular Malaysia. In the same area (800 m) on 29th January, a pair of **Wrinkled Hornbill** *A. corrugatus* were seen, extending the known range and elevation limits for the species in the peninsula (GN,DY). A Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* was found paired with a **Common x Jungle Myna** *A. fuscus* hybrid in Johor on 3rd February (GN). The latter species is already under threat due to the rapid spread of feral **Javan Mynas** *A. javanicus* in the region.

A nest of **Wallace's Hawk Eagle** *Spizaetus* *nanus*, containing a single fluffy chick, was discovered in a busy logging camp in Temengor FR (580 m), Perak (near the Kelantan border) on 17th December. On a return visit from 26th–31st January, the young bird was already making its first clumsy flights to neighbouring trees (see page 68 for photos).

Brunei

There were daily gatherings of **Malaysian Plovers** *Charadrius peronii* and **Little Ringed Plovers** *C. dubius* on the rugby field at the Panaga Club, Kuala Bela, during mid-late March, with maxima of 22 and 49 respectively on 18th (JB).

Sabah

A minimum of eight **Scaly-breasted Munias** *Lonchura punctulata*, including four recently fledged young, were seen at Dalit Bay Golf Club (adjacent to Rasa Ria Resort), north of Kota Kinabalu on 23rd–25th March (JB); recent colonists?

MYANMAR

In Tenasserim (Taninthayi), at Kanbauk village, Yephyu township on the early morning of 20th May 2002, a storm and torrential rain resulted in an incredible crash of exhausted **Sooty Terns** *Sterna fuscata*, some with broken wings. A rescue attempt was made and, of over 200 birds picked-up, over 160 recovered and went on their way later the same day (NM). Amazingly, this appears to be the first record from Tenasserim. See also its occurrence in Thailand two days later.

NEPAL

A remarkable new species for the country was a **Red-throated Loon** *Gavia stellata* at Koshi Barrage on 12th and 15th February (SA,DG,RS,HCh); it was still their on 19th February (SBa,AO,GTe). Also of interest was a flock of c.35 **Common Wood Pigeons** *Columba palumbus* at Phulchowki, Kathmandu Valley on 8th January, with up to 200 the following day (NB,LC,SBa). Large flocks were then repeatedly seen in January and February (TG,HCh,SGC). **Slaty-legged Crake** *Rallina eurizonoides* has been found breeding near Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge, an adult with three chicks being noted on 8th September (KRT). A **White-eyed Buzzard** *Butastur teesa* flying over Thamel on 22nd February (AO,GTe) was a new species for the Kathmandu Valley, and a pair of **Red-headed Buntings** *Emberiza bruniceps* were found at Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve on 18th February (GTe,AO,SB).

PHILIPPINES

Two flocks of **Philippine Ducks** *Anas luzonica* totalling 390 birds were found on Paoay Lake, south-west of Laoag City, north-west Luzon on 18th April (HN). A pair of **Northern Shovelers** *Anas clypeata* in one of these flocks were at least a month later than the previous late date for the species in the Philippines. Also of note in north Luzon was a male **Malaysian Plover** *Charadrius peronii* at Mayraira Point (Luzon's northernmost point) on 8th April (HN).

SINGAPORE

New records for Pulau Tekong (SR unless stated) were a single **Chestnut-winged Cuckoo** *Clamator coromandus* on 21st February, a single **Banded Bay Cuckoo** *Cacomantis sonneratii* on 15th February and two on 29th March, a **Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot** *Loriculus galgulus* on 18th January, a **Whiskered Treeswift** *Hemiprocne comata* on 22nd February (the 5th recent record from Singapore of this former resident), **Brown Hawk Owl** *Ninox scutulata* heard on 18th January and 1st February, followed by three (two birds seen proved to be resident *scutulata*) on 21st February, up to ten **Thick-billed Green Pigeons** *Treron curvirostra* on 10th July 2002 (RO,SR), a male **Cinnamon-headed Green Pigeon** *T. fulvicollis* on 13th June 2002, a **Spotted Wood Owl** *Strix seloputo* heard on 17th January and two heard on 31st January, a single **Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo* on 17th January, a **Chinese Egret** *Egretta eulophotes* on 15th February, a single **Blue-winged Pitta** *Pitta moluccensis* seen on 14th February and another heard on 21st February, and single **Asian House Martins** *Delichon dasypus* on 18th January and 14th February. Following the first record of **Blue-eared Kingfisher** *Alcedo meninting* in January, it has been heard at three other sites on Pulau Tekong in June

Spotted Wood Owl *Strix seloputo* by Supari

Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus* by Hil Bruinsma

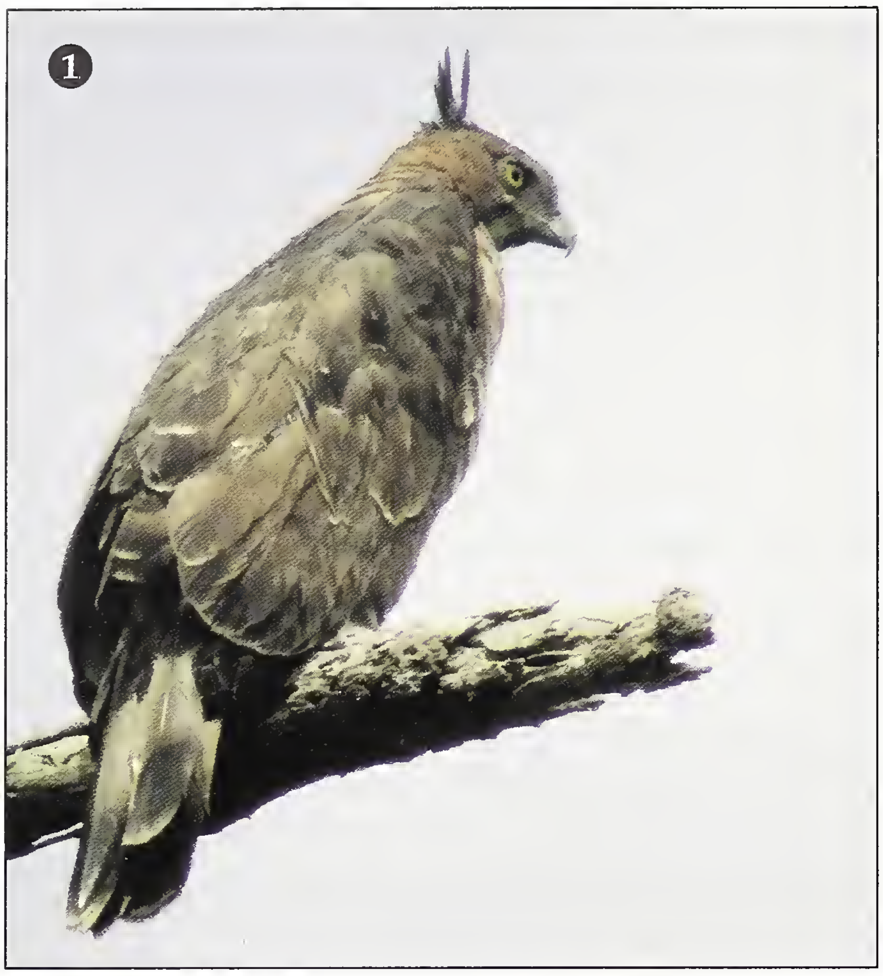
and July 2002 (RO,SR). Additionally, an adult was seen at Poyan North on 10th February (RO,DW,SR), a new site record, and only the second from the Western Catchment Area. Following the first sighting of **Green Imperial Pigeon** *Ducula aenea* on Pulau Tekong in mid-January, nine were seen on 31st January and 12 on 21st February, raising hopes that the species could prove to be resident in Singapore. A female **Red Junglefowl** *Gallus gallus* with three chicks at Changi Coastal Road on April 30th (NH,RO,SR) is the first confirmed breeding record from the main island. An adult **Yellow-eared Spiderhunter** *Arachnothera chrysogenys* at Pulau Ubin on 3rd February (PDo,RO,SR) was quite possibly the same individual that first appeared as a juvenile (post-breeding disperser) in 1998.

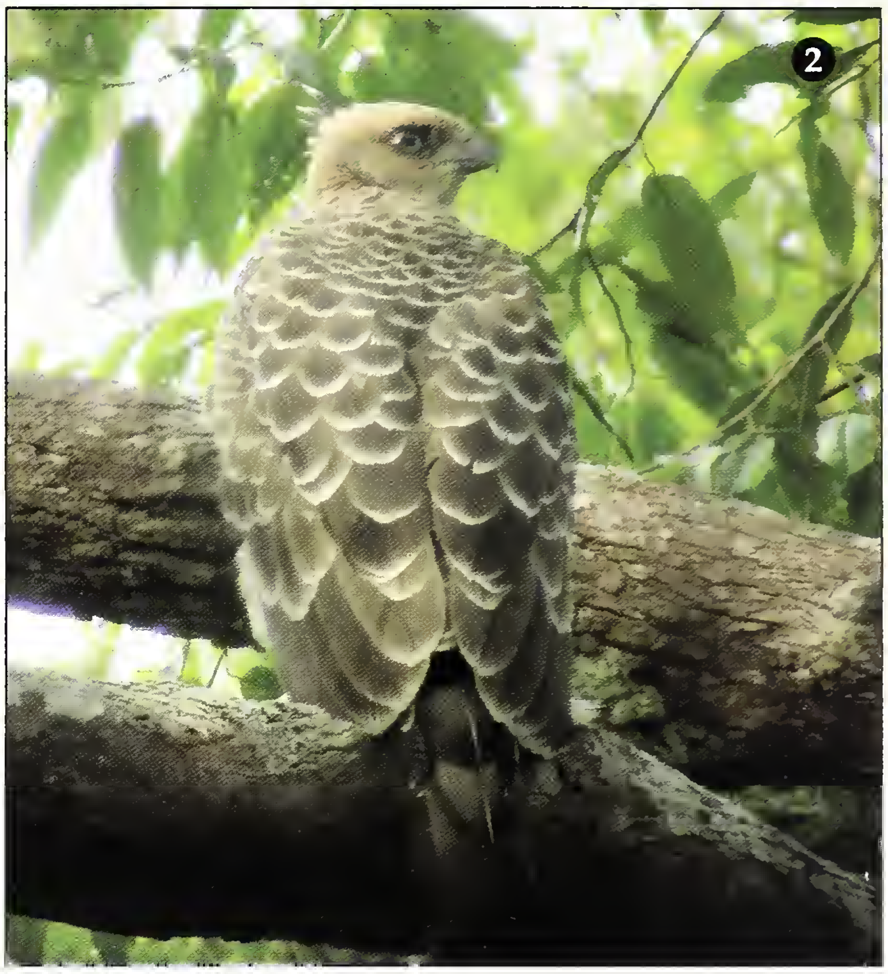
SRI LANKA

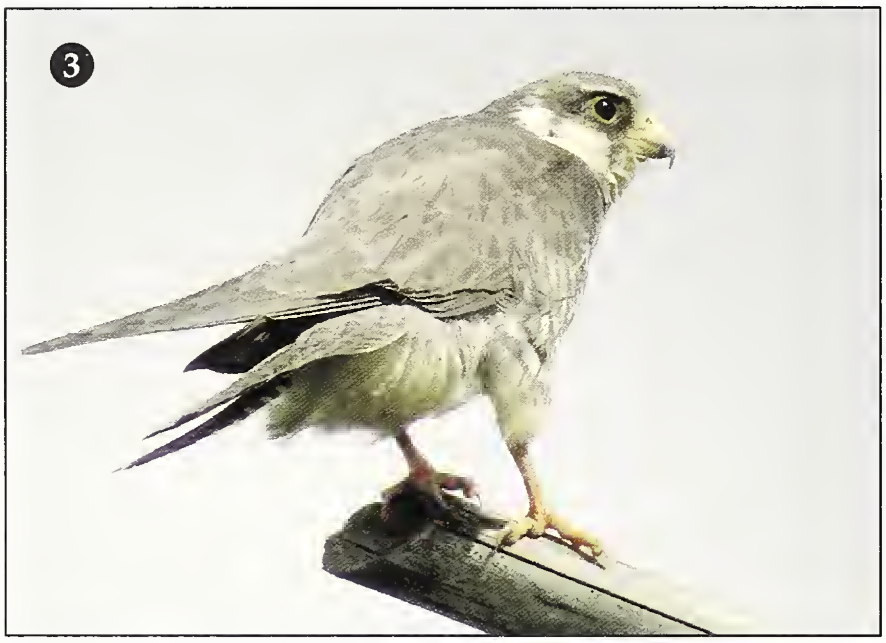
A single **Eurasian Wryneck** *Jynx torquilla* netted and ringed during the DWLC-FOGSL-Jetwing Bird Ringing Program at Palatupana Lewaya, during 2nd–9th April, provided the first conclusive occurrence of the species in Sri Lanka (JH *et al.*). A record of **Rain Quail** *Coturnix coromandelianus* at Bibile on 26th April (KB,WW) was perhaps only the third in the last 25 years.

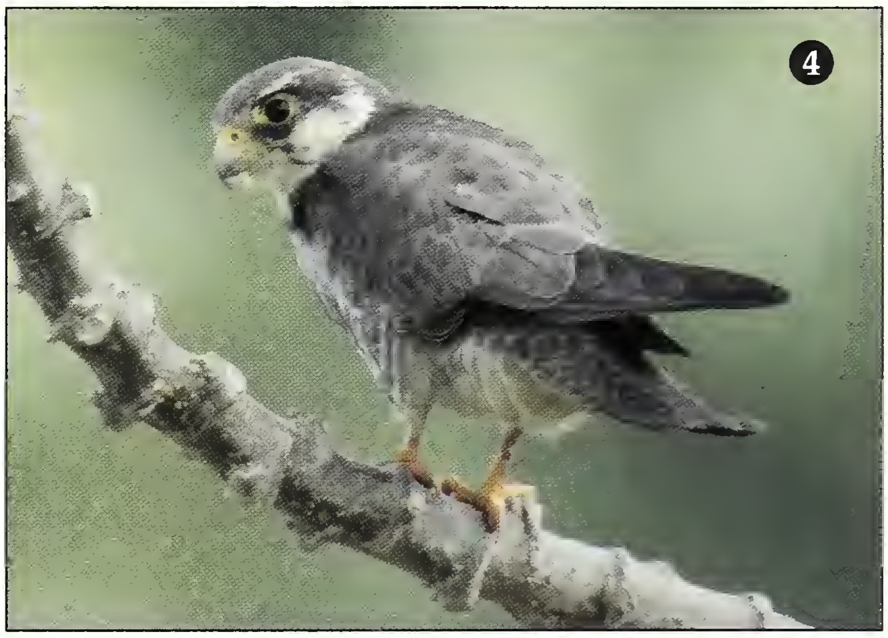
TAIWAN

During a survey of Northern Islets, there were some interesting sightings of pelagic birds. A single **Red-tailed Tropicbird** *Phaethon rubricauda* (Y-HH,S-CC) and two **Long-tailed Jaegers** *Stercorarius longicaudus* (Y-HH) at Tiao-Yu-Tai, Taipei on 20th April, were both new records for Taiwan and two **Masked Boobies** *Sula dactylatra* there the same day (S-CC,Y-HH) constituted the fourth Taiwan record. Other rarities and unusual sightings during the first half of 2002 have included three **Common Shelducks** *Tadorna tadorna* at Hua-Chiang-Chiao, Taipei from 6th January–22nd February (Y-HC), a single **Ruddy Shelduck** *T. ferruginea* at Kuan-Tu, Taipei on 27th–28th April (P-JC,S-CC,C-YP), a **Philippine Duck** *Anas luzonica* at Kuan-Tu on 25th February (P-CW,M-HT), the fourth Taiwan record, two **American Wigeon** *Anas americana* at Wen-Ti, Ilan on 3rd February (P-HC), two **Red-breasted Mergansers** *Mergus serrator* at Tung-Shih, Chiayi on 5th January (C-YT), and another at Wen-Ti from 12th January–17th February (Y-HH,C-AL), single **Ruddy Kingfishers** *Halcyon coromanda* at Teh-Liu, Taipei on 23rd March (S-CC), Chih-Pei, Penghu Archipelago on 21st May 2002 (W-NL), and Ta-Yuan, Taoyuan on 26th May 2002 (S-CC), a **Japanese Wood Pigeon** *Columba janthina* at Teh-Liu on 23rd March (W-YH,S-CC), the sixth record, 90 **Little Curlews** *Numenius minutus* at Tung-Shih on 20th April (C-YT), an **Asian Dowitcher** *Limnodromus semipalmatus* at Pei-Men, Tainan on 20th January (K-AL), 15 **Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax* at Chiayi city on 14th February (L-LW), two **Long-billed Dowitchers** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* at Li-Tze, Ilan from 20th January (Y-SH)–17th February (H-WC), and two at Kuan-Tu on 25th February (P-CW), single **Pectoral Sandpipers** *Calidris melanotos* at Kan-Nan, Hsinchu on 25th April (W-HL), and Chin-Shan, Taipei on 17th April (Y-MH), a single **Stilt Sandpiper** *Micropalama himantopus* at Han-Pao, Changhwa on 10th March (J-CH), a **Long-billed Plover** *Charadrius placidus* at Lan-Yang Estuary, Ilan on 31th March (C-AL), single **Mew Gulls** *Larus canus* at Lan-Yang Estuary on 12th February (C-AL), and Wen-Ti on 4th June 2002 (F-TL), a **Slaty-backed Gull** *L. schistisagus* at Lan-Yang Estuary on 12th February (C-AL), a single **Pallas's Gull** *L. ichthyaetus* at Tung-Shih on 21st January (C-YT), the fourth from Taiwan, a single **White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla* at Tsuei-Feng-Hu, Ilan on 11th January and 20th April (F-TL,L-YH), two **Common Buzzards** *Buteo buteo* at Au-Ku, Chiayi on 5th January (W-LL), single **Rough-legged Buzzards** *B. lagopus* at Tung-Shih on 16th January (C-YT), and Chiu-Ping, Nantou on 20th January (C-LH), single **Greater Spotted Eagles** *Aquila clanga* at Chi-Shan, Kaohsiung on 19th January (F-KH), Lin-Nei, Yunlin on 4th April (C-YT), and Shih-Men, Taipei on 10th March (C-ST), an **Imperial Eagle** *A. heliaca* at Ta-Ku-Shan, Taoyuan on 3rd June 2002 (K-YC), three **Horned Grebes** *Podiceps auritus* at Lung-Luan-Tan, Pingtung on 7th February (Y-JT), single **Black-necked Grebes** *P. nigricollis* at Ta-Yuan on 1st January (K-AL), and Wen-Ti on 12th January (C-FF,Y-HH), three **Lesser Frigatebirds** *Fregata ariel* at Cheng-Hsi-Li, Tainan on 7th May 2002 (Y-









1 & 2. Wallace's Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus nanus*, adult (left) and juvenile (right), Temengor Forest Reserve, Perak, Malaysia, January 2002. Both photos by Tee Lian Huat. (see page 66 for details)

3 & 4. Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*, Sg Balang ricefields, Batu Pahat, Johor, Malaysia, 3 February 2002. Both photos by Tee Lian Huat (see page 65 for details).

TF), two **Great Frigatebirds** *F. minor* at Yeh-Liu, Taipei on 6th March (K-YY), a single **Great Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris* at Lung-Luan-Tan on 30th January (Y-JT), a **Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* at Tung-Shih on 5th January–9th February (L-LW), an **Oriental Stork** *C. boyciana* at Yung-An, Kaohsiung on 15th April (J-CS), single **Tiger Shrikes** *Lanius tigrinus* at Sun Moon Lake, Nantou on 19th January (C-LL), and Pu-Li, Nantou on 16th May 2002 (C-CC), two **Black-winged Cuckooshrikes** *Coracina melaschistos* at Li-Ting-Shan, Pingtung on 14th February (P-HH), 20 **Ashy Minivets** *Pericrocotus divaricatus* at Li-Ting-Shan on 14th February (P-HH), 32 **Japanese Waxwings** *Bombycilla japonica* at Kuan-Wu, Hsinchu on 21st April (S-KS), single **Eurasian Blackbirds** *Turdus merula* at Keng-Ting, Pingtung on 12th February (P-HH), and Taipei airport on 27th February (C-HW), two **Grey-backed Thrushes** *T. hortulorum* at Teh-Liu on 31st March (S-CC), two **Red-throated Flycatchers** *Ficedula parva* at Teh-Liu on 26th April (Y-MH), two **Bluethroats** *Luscinia svecica* at Hua-Tan, Changhwa on 11th February (C-YC), a single **Japanese Wagtail** *Motacilla grandis* at Han-Hsi, Ilan on 2nd March (C-AL), and eight **Japanese Grosbeaks** *Eophona personata* at An-Ma-Shan, Taichung on 10th February (C-KH). Also of note were counts of **Saunders's Gull** *L. saundersi*, with 300 at Tung-Shih on 1st January (T-MY), and 286 at Han-Pao, Changhwa on 16th January (P-HC).

THAILAND

Some very welcome and detailed recent observations were received from Phuket Island, covering the winter 2001/02 period (DE). Seven species appear to be recorded from the island for the first time: a single female-type-plumaged **Watercock** *Gallicrex cinerea* in the Laguna area on 30th December, maxima of at least eight **Purple Swamphens** *Porphyrio porphyrio* and 18 **Common Moorhens** *Gallinula chloropus* in the Laguna area during 28th December–4th January, seven **Grey-headed Lapwings** *Vanellus cinereus* at Bang Tao on 25th December, two **Black-headed Ibises** *Threskiornis melanocephalus* (apparently non-breeding adults) along the Laguna Beach Resort road on 28th December, a single **Asian House Martin** *Delichon dasypus* along the Loch Palm road on 11th and 13th October, and three **White-vented Mynas** *Acridotheres grandis* near the Boat Lagoon, north of Phuket town on 23rd December, with two more along the Kamala road on 7th February. The following species were confirmed as residents on Phuket: **Orange-breasted Green Pigeon** *Treron bicincta*, **Green Imperial Pigeon** *Ducula aenea*, **Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, and **Mangrove Whistler** *Pachycephala grisola*. **Little Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax niger* was confirmed as a winter visitor, and **Blue-tailed Bee-eater** *Merops philippinus* as a winter visitor/passage migrant. Also of interest were seven **Malaysian Plovers** *Charadrius peronii* at Layan Beach Resort (a site that is likely to be disturbed by development) on 4th January (the first recent records from the island?), and two **Chinese Pond Herons** *Ardeola bacchus* on 16th September, provided a new early date for the peninsula. A **Straw-headed Bulbul** *Pycnonotus zeylanicus* at Katu, Phuket on 12th April (IS) was presumably an escape from captivity. A **Scarlet-rumped Trogon** *Harpactes duvaucelii* on the way to Thorthip Waterfall, Kaeng Krachan National Park on 27th March (UT) was a new bird for the park and a considerable northward range extension for the species, while **Ruddy Kingfisher** *Halcyon coromanda* at km 16–17 in the park on 27th January (PP) was also noteworthy. The earliest reported **Common Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis* was at Mahidol University Salaya Campus, Nakhon Pathom, on 2nd August 2002 (PR), whilst a **Rufous-backed Kingfisher** *Ceyx rufidorsa* seen bathing in a stream at Du-lu, Thung Yai Naresuan, Kanchanaburi, on 1st August 2002 (ST) is the northernmost reported Thai record to date. A flock of 30 needletails, apparently migrating over Khao Soi Dao Wildlife Sanctuary, Chanthaburi on 15th August 2002 (AN), contained at least 12 **White-throated Needletails** *Hirundapus caudacutus*, and two **Eurasian Curlews** *Numenius arquata*, seen heading SSW over the area the same day (AN), were the first to be recorded inland in SE Thailand. Two **Spoon-billed Sandpipers** *Calidris pygmeus* were still present at Khok Kham on 24th March (RH,RB,MB per MG), one was reported on 2nd April (JG) and, remarkably, one was still present there on 22nd April, in breeding plumage (PS). No fewer than 13 **Pied Avocets** *Recurvirostra avosetta*, a vagrant for which there are no previous records of more than two at any one time, were reported from Ban Khao Takhrao, Ban Laem District, Phetchaburi on 13th April (SM). Two **Great Thick-knees** *Esacus recurvirostris* were found upstream from Chiang Khong on 6th December (ND). In the south, seven first-year **Sooty Terns** *Sterna fuscata* were seen over the beach at Laem Son, Ranong on 22nd May 2002 (YM,PR), two days after a large wreck of the species in nearby Tenasserim, Myanmar (see that section). There are very few previous Thai records, though, interestingly, the second of these was also from Ranong, a month later than the current record. Six **Bridled Terns** *S. anaethetus* (thought to be nesting) and ten **Black-naped Terns** *S. sumatrana* (including two small young) were seen at Ko Saak, Mu Ko Chumphon National Park, Tambol Hat Sairee, Chumphon on 22nd June 2002 (CN). A single **Black Baza** *Aviceda leuphotes* over the TAT Pond in Khao Yai National Park on 31st May 2002 (PR) was an unusual record, because it was outside the wintering/passage season, when the breeding population should be concentrated in low elevation, drier and more open forests. A remarkably early **Chinese Egret** *Egretta eulophotes*, reported from Cha-am, Phetchaburi on 27th July 2002 (PS), would be the first record away from the peninsula. Single breeding plumaged **Indian Pond Herons** *Ardeola grayii* were seen in Mu Ko Chumphon National Park, Chumphon on 11th May 2002 (CN), and at Ban Ilet, Hat Sai Ri, Muang District, Chumphon on 25th May 2002 (CN), whilst single breeding-plumaged **Javan Pond Herons** *A. speciosa* were seen at Ban I-Let, Hat Sairee, Mu Ko Chumphon National Park, Chumphon on 11th and 31st May 2002 (CN). There were a remarkable nine **Glossy Ibises** *Plegadis falcinellus* at Bung Boraphet, Nakhon Sawan on 19th and 21st July 2002 (WS). The only other waterbirds of note were five **Painted Storks** *Mycteria leucocephala* at Bang Pahan, Ayutthaya on 8th April (PP), and a single **Lesser Adjutant** *Leptoptilos javanicus* flying over marshes and paddyfields somewhere between Samut Sakhon and Samut Songkhram on 23rd June 2002 (EV). **Green Broadbills** *Calyptomena viridis* recorded from Jakae Thong on 7th March and Sara-wa on

9th–10th March, in Thung Yai Wildlife Sanctuary (ST), may be the most northerly Thai records to date. Six **Red-billed Blue Magpies** *Urocissa erythrorhyncha* were present at the Queen Sirikit Forest Flora Education Center, Suan Phung, Ratchaburi on 2nd August 2002 (CK). As there are currently no known records of the species from this part of C Thailand, the question has been raised of whether they were released or genuinely wild birds. **Black-naped Oriole** *Oriolus chinensis* appeared to be nesting in dry dipterocarp woodland at Sap Sadao, Thap Lan, Nakhon Ratchasima on 23rd June 2002 (NT) and, if confirmed, would apparently be the first to be found breeding away from the extreme south. There was a single **Common Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris* at Thaton, Chiang Mai on 3rd December 2001 (ND), and a **White-shouldered Starling** *S. chinensis* at Pa Phru Sirindhorn, Narathiwat on 9th April (PK) was unusually far south. Several **Black-throated Tits** *Aegithalos concinnus* at Doi Dong Ya Wai, Doi Phu Kha National Park, Nan during 17th–21st March (ST) constituted a notable range extension. Three **Light-vented Bulbuls** *Pycnonotus sinensis*, found with **Mountain Bulbuls** *Hypsipetes mcclellandii* on Doi Pha Hom Pok, Chiang Mai during 28th December–2nd January (CKl), were the first from the north-west, and perhaps only the second record for Thailand. A record of **Chestnut-flanked White-eye** *Zosterops erythropleurus* at Kaeng Krachan NP on 28th January (FGT) was apparently the first from the park and the most southerly in Thailand to date. The sighting of three **White-crested Laughingthrushes** *Garrulax leucolophus* (including a juvenile), at Sammakorn 2 Village, Bangkok on 10th February (JW) suggests that a city population is becoming established from escaped cagebirds. **Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush** *G. erythrocephalus* was common on Doi Khao Yai, Thung Yai WS during 2nd–3rd March (ST). A **Long-billed Spiderhunter** *Arachnothera robusta* reported from the base of Thorthip Waterfall, Kaeng Krachan NP on 22nd June 2002 (EV) would, if accepted, be a new bird for the park and a very significant northward range extension. Ten **Citrine Wagtails** *Motacilla citreola* at Thung Feua, Phetchaburi on 20th January (BK,KS) were well south. A **Yellow-billed Grosbeak** *Eophona migratoria* seen and photographed at the Bangjak Project site, Phra Khanong, Bangkok on 1st June 2002 (BBC) was thought to have escaped from captivity (it is imported from China in large numbers). Recent high counts have included an amazing 122 **Pin-tailed Green Pigeons** *Treron apicauda* (the largest-ever count) at a mineral lick at Doi Pha Nor, Mae Jarim National Park, Nan on 31st March (ST), and an impressive 20 **Grey-tailed Tattlers** *Heteroscelus brevipes* at a high-tide roost on a pond at Bang Pu, Samut Prakan on 14th May 2002 (WS). The hills west of Cha-am, Phetchaburi, produced counts of 1,000, 400 and 650 **Black Bazas** (c.65% of the total) and **Chinese Sparrowhawks** *Accipiter soloensis* (c.35% of the total) on three successive days, 31st March–2nd April (MD). A male **Rufous-bellied Niltava** *Niltava sundara* at km 10 (c.450 m), Doi Inthanon on 18th February (DE) provided a new low elevation record for Thailand. Noteworthy breeding records during the period under review were: **Rufous-throated Partridge** *Arborophila rufogularis* with two young on Doi Khao Yai, Thung Yai WS on 2nd–3rd March (ST), two adult **Silver Pheasants** *Lophura nycthemera* with two small juveniles at Kaeng Krachan NP on 21st June 2002 (EV), **Green-eared Barbet** *Megalaima faiostricta* excavating a nest-hole at Kaeng Krachan NP on 28th May 2002 (ST), **White-crowned Hornbill** *Aceros comatus* feeding young in a nest at Bala, Hala-Bala Wildlife Sanctuary on 1st June 2002 (ST), **Blue-banded Kingfisher** *Alcedo euryzona* incubating at Kaeng Krachan NP on 27th May 2002 (ST), a nest with young of **Banded Kingfisher** *Lacedo pulchella* in an arboreal termitarium at Khao Yai NP on 20th June 2002 (AP,PR), a pair of **Blue-rumped Parrots** *Psittinus cyanurus* with young in a nest at Kaeng Krachan NP on 17th February (NU), **Orange-breasted Pigeon** sitting on a nest on Ko Saak, Mu Ko Chumphon NP, on 22nd June 2002 (CN), a nest with three young of **Blue Pitta** *Pitta cyanea* on Doi Khao Yai, Thung Yai WS on 4th March (ST), **Common Green Magpies** *Cissa chinensis* feeding four well-grown nestlings at Kaeng Krachan NP on 18th August 2002 (SK), **Great Iora** *Aegithina lafresnayei* with fledged young at Khao Nor Chuchi on 24th July 2002 (ST), **White-browed Shortwing** *Brachypteryx montana* feeding fledged young at Doi Dong Ya Wai, Doi Phu Kha NP, Nan (also a range extension for the species in Thailand) during 17th–21st March (ST), **Malaysian Blue Flycatcher** *Cyornis turcosus* with recently fledged young at Phru To Daeng on 1st June 2002 (ST), **Ochraceous Bulbul** *Alophoixus ochraceus* incubating at Kaeng Krachan NP on 27th May 2002 (ST), **Moustached Babbler** *Malacopteron magnirostre* with fledged young at Khao Nor Chuchi on 25th July 2002 (ST), **Pygmy Wren Babbler** *Pnoepyga pusilla* nest-building at Doi Inthanon NP on 16th June 2002 (EV), and a pair of **Black-eared Shrike Babblers** *Pteruthius melanotis* nest-building on Doi Inthanon on 23rd and 20th February respectively (DE).

VIETNAM

Some very interesting observations were made during a visit spanning December–January (AA). Two **Common Chiffchaffs** *Phylloscopus collybita tristis* near Sa Pa, W Tonkin, were the first from Vietnam and SE Asia as a whole. Two **Grey-headed Parakeets** *Psittacula finschii*, and a female **Northern Goshawk** *Accipiter gentilis* at Cat Tien National Park were both the first from Cochinchina, and two observations were made of **Japanese Robin** *Erithacus akahige*, with singles at Cuc Phuong National Park, E Tonkin, and Cat Tien NP (the latter the first from Cochinchina). Also of note were two **Chinese Egrets** *Egretta eulophotes* and a **Christmas Island Frigatebird** *Fregata andrewsi* at Xuan Thuy, Red River Delta, E Tonkin, and a **Red-headed Vulture** *Sarcogyps calvus* south of Da Lat, S Annam; perhaps the only recent confirmed record away from Dac Lac province.

Contributors

A. Allport (AA), Ang Tropeang Thmor Conservation Team (ATTCT), S. Arlow (SA), S. Bale (SB), Bangjak Birdwatching Club (BBC), S. Basnet (SBa), P. Batchelor (PB), C. Bennetts (CB), K. Betton (KB), Birdquest, J. Bowler (JB), M. Braun (MB), R. Braun (RB), N. Bray (NB), E. Briggs (EB), P. Bunnat (PB), C. Campion (CC), H. Chamnan (HC), H-W. Chang (H-WC), S-C. Chang (S-CC), S. Chansotcheat (SC), P-H. Chen (P-HC), P-J. Chen (P-JC), S-C. Chen (S-CC), Y-H. Chen (Y-HC), K-Y. Chien (K-YC), C-C. Chiu (C-CC), H. Choudhary (HCh), C-Y. Chung (C-YC), T. Clements (TC), L. Collins (LC), J. Daltry (JD), P. Davidson (PD), M. Davies (MD), P. Dove (PDo), N. Dymond (ND), J. Eames (JE), D. Evans (DE), T. Evans (TE), D. Farrow (DF), C-F. Fen (C-FF), Field Guides Tour (FGT), T. Ford (TF), Y-T. Fu (Y-TF), D. Giri (DG), T. Giri (TG), F. Goes (FG), M. Guyt (MG), N. Hatch (NH), P. Heath (PH), Y-H. Ho (Y-HH), P. Holt (PHo), R. Hopf (RH), J. Hornbuckle (JH), J. Hornskov (JHo), L-Y. Hou (L-YH), C-L. Hsueh (C-LH), C-K. Huang (C-KH), F-K. Huang (F-KH), J-C. Huang (J-CH), P-H. Huang (P-HH), W-Y. Huang (W-YH), Y-S. Huang (Y-SH), Y-M. Huang (Y-MH), R. Johns (RJ), S. Johns (SJ), D. Judell (DJ), R. Kanoje (RK), C. Khemsap (CK), L. Kheng (LK), B. Khieoyuu (BK), P. Khlongtapao (PK), S. Klabdee (SK), C. Klinjapo (CKl), K. Leng (KL), C-L. Li (C-LL), C-A. Lin (C-AL), F-T. Lin (F-TL), W-H. Lin (W-HL), W-L. Lin (W-LL), W-N. Lin (W-NL), K-A. Lu (K-AL), Y. Meekaeo (YM), S. Mukachornphan (SM), Nature Trails (NT), Ngwe Moe (NM), N. Nivot (NN), A. Noorlander (AN), G. Noramly (GN), C. Nualsri (CN), H. Nuytemans (HN), A. Ofner (AO), R. Ollington (RO), Ong Tun Pin (OTP), M. Ounsted (MO), R. Ounsted (ROu), R. Overtoom (ROv), R. Pailey (RP), C-Y. Pan (C-YP), P. Phuapattankul (PP), A. Pierce (AP), M. Poh (MP), S. Polin (SP), C. Poole (CP), A. Prasad (APr), Prek Toal Conservation Team (PTCT), S. Rajathurai (SR), O. Ratanak (OR), P. Round (PR), P. Saengkaew (PS), W. Sanguansombat (WS), Seng Kim Hout (SKH), S. Senglay (SS), S. Seri (SSe), T. Setha (TS), A. Sharma (AS), S-K. Shen (S-KS), A. Singh (ASi), Som GC (SGC), J-C. Su (J-CS), Sunbird, I. Suriwong (IS), K. Suriyo (KS), R. Suwal (RS), G. Talbot (GT), Kalu Ram Tamang (KRT), S. Tantitadapitak (ST), L. Taylor (LT), G. Tebb (GTe), C-S. Ting (C-ST), J. Tordoff (JT), U. Treesucon (UT), T. Triet (TT), C-Y. Tsai (C-YT), Y-J. Tsai (Y-JT), M-H. Tsao (M-HT), E. VanderWerf (EV), S. Visal (SV), C-H. Wang (C-HW), P-C. Wang (P-CW), A. Watanayut (AW), D. Wells (DW), W. Wickramasekera (WW), D. Wilson (DWi), Woei-horng Fang, L-L. Wu (L-LW), K-Y. Yao (K-YY), D. Yong (DY), T-M. Yueh (T-MY), R. Zepp (RZ).

Contributor guidelines

Large numbers of records are still being received that do not qualify for inclusion in this section, causing the compiler a great deal of unnecessary work and the observers varying degrees of disappointment. The kind of records that we are looking for are:

- easily discernible/significant new distributional records
- records of vagrants to a country (i.e. species recorded fewer than ten times)
- new localities for threatened species
- records of large waterbirds where in severe decline
- high counts
- records containing new breeding data etc.

It would help greatly if observers could extract their own interesting records from trip reports and spell out the reasons for a record's significance. Other records (not included in *From the Field*) will, of course, be gratefully received for the OBC files/library.

Addendum

Regarding the record of Indian Skimmer *Rynchops albicollis* mentioned in the Thailand section of *From the Field* in Bulletin 35. This record was incorrectly attributed to P. Round, instead of Piyatpong Rapeephan. BCST also subsequently received information from Wim van Splunder, who saw the bird on 18th January.

To the Editor

Forest degradation in Lava, West Bengal

The village of Lava (Labha) in the eastern Himalayan hills in northern West Bengal, close to Bhutan's western border, has been known as a birding hotspot for at least 12 years, and many western birders have been there and experienced fantastic forest birding with a high number of rare or restricted-range sought-after species. The village is surrounded by mature evergreen forest, mostly broad-leaved but with some coniferous stands also. Birding areas are between 1,600 and 2,400 m a.s.l. The area is described on pp131–134 of *A Birdwatchers' Guide to India*, by Krys Kazmierczak and Raj Singh.

Some of the rarer species to be seen around Lava are Satyr Tragopan *Tragopan satyra*, Ashy Wood Pigeon *Columba pulchricollis*, Rufous-throated *Spelaeornis caudatus* and Spotted *S. formosus* Wren Babblers, Yellow-throated Fulvetta *Alcippe cinerea*, Red-faced Liocichla *Liocichla phoenicea*, Rusty-bellied Shortwing *Brachypteryx hyperythra*, Blue-fronted Robin *Cinclidium frontale* and Long-billed Thrush *Zoothera monticola*. The nearby Neora Valley National Park can add Ward's Trogon *Harpactes wardi* (found by Edward Vercruysse) and Gould's Shortwing *B. stellata* (found in March 2002 by myself), and the habitat in the national park looks ideal for Wedge-billed Wren Babbler *Sphenocichla humei* too.

It seems that the forest is under the authority and theoretical protection of the West Bengal State Forest Department, which has a complex of buildings and a Forest Resthouse on the edge of the village, as well as signs up at the few small replanted patches by the village.

In the last five years I have made three visits to Lava: 30 November–31 December 1997, 16–21 October 1998 and most recently 21 March–1 April 2002.

Most of the inhabitants of Lava and the surrounding villages are poor and have been cutting firewood and fodder for their animals for many years, but on my latest visit I was shocked to find a whole new scale of forest devastation. Three of the prime birding areas are affected – the slope above the road west of Lava towards Algarah, the slope above the jeep track on the south side below the village, and along the jeep track to the east of the village (leading to Rachela, not to Neora Valley as indicated on p131 of Kazmierczak & Singh).

Ward's Trogon *Harpactes wardi* by Craig Robson (Courtesy of Birdquest)

In these three areas, most (if not all) large hardwood trees of any commercial value have been or are being removed. This is being carried out by a company called the West Bengal Forest Development Corporation Limited (a Government of West Bengal Undertaking) – that is part of their title – 6A, Raja Subodh Mullick Square, 7th floor, Kolkata 700013. It is clearly being done with the total compliance of the West Bengal State Forest Department.

On the roadside verges outside the Forest Department complex on the edge of Lava village, I counted 350 sawn logs and 170 round logs, while my bus journey from Lava to Siliguri on 2 April, 2002 took me past several huge compounds containing, probably, thousands of round logs.

Thus the forests around Lava are now devastated by the loss of huge numbers of large trees, by the numerous haul-out scars and by subsequent rock-falls and erosion. Additionally, there are several areas where many coniferous trees have been removed, there is ongoing individual removal of trees from many areas for private gain, firewood collection (most of it of live timber) and fodder collection by scores of locals on a daily basis. There is increasing intrusion into the forest east of Lava by cattle farmers who erect compounds and simple houses and cut down a huge amount of the middle and lower storey trees and bamboo so that their animals can live on a diet of leaves.

Amazingly, the birding is still excellent, even within 2–3 km of the village, where a very high percentage of understorey is cut out, repeatedly, I presume. But it is now a long hike from Lava to find undisturbed and undamaged forest. The upper track east of Lava leads to Neora Valley N.P. I was informed by Mr Phonur Sherpa, the owner of the Green Valley Lodge in Lava where I stayed this year, that requests by westerners to visit the national park are normally refused by the office in Kalimpong. I am sure this is correct as there is no proper accommodation or facilities in the park. However, Mr Sherpa was able to arrange a two-night visit for me, as he had done in a previous year for Edward Vercruysse. So I walked in with a porter/guide and all my food. It is a hike of four hours or so, depending on fitness and birding stops, and the national park checkpost and primary forest is reached after 4–5 km (minimum two hours) from Lava. Further on is a long, steep descent into the valley where a water scheme pipeline provides a trail southwards downstream from the accommodation site (very basic huts, manned permanently by water scheme personnel).

I enjoyed two half-days and one full day in the valley, but even here was alarmed by the constant thwack of an axe on the east side of the river, several kilometres downstream from the base: clearly some illegal logging was taking place even within the national park.

Lava is promoted as a hill resort, mainly for residents of Calcutta, and there is an increasing number of lodges being built, with, of course, an ever increasing need for firewood and an increasing quantity of garbage, most, if not all, of which is dumped around the village. There are small areas on both the north and south facing slopes below the village where some replanting has taken place, part of it being a dense monoculture stand of young saplings.

The overall future for the village and the general area is extremely grim, and undoubtedly the ongoing large-scale logging is going to be of no benefit to the village whatsoever.

Nick Dymond, Springfield, Scousburgh, Shetland, ZE2 9JE, (Scotland) U.K.

Kashmir Flycatcher *Ficedula subrubra* nesting in Sri Lanka?

A pair of Kashmir Flycatchers *Ficedula subrubra* displaying distinct nesting behaviour were observed on 3 August 2000, at 1,700 m elevation in a tea plantation at the Dambatenne Estate (6°46' N, 80°59' E) close to Haputale, in the southern part of the Sri Lankan highlands.

Both male and female birds were observed at close range (3–15 m) over a period of about 20 minutes. Both birds were easy to observe and were not disturbed by our presence. The birds were first observed on the ground, flicking wings and tail – a typical behaviour of the species.[1] The male then took off to a nearby bush where he sang and was also seen catching insects. The female continuously caught insects, either on the ground 3 m away from us or over nearby tea bushes and then flew off with the catch to a tea bush fewer than 10 m from our observation point, where she disappeared. This was repeated at least five times. On one occasion the male was also seen carrying insects to the same tea bush, but most of his time was spent singing.

The work we were involved in did not allow observations for more than 20 minutes and no attempt to find a nest was made. However, the behaviour of the birds clearly indicates an ongoing nesting. The Kashmir Flycatcher is normally a winter visitor to Sri Lanka and I have not been able to find any previous record in the literature of nesting in Sri Lanka. However, there are other examples of bird species nesting in what is normally their wintering area. In southern Africa several Palearctic birds have been noted to occasionally nest. Most reports seem to be of large conspicuous species such as raptors and stork, but small passerines such as the House Martin *Delichon urbica* have also been noted.[2] It is possible that small birds nesting in their wintering area are often overlooked and that this is a more common phenomenon than realised.

Acknowledgements

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Henrik Kylin, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Department of Environmental Assessment, Environmental Organic Chemistry, P.O. Box 7050, SE-750 07 Uppsala, Sweden. Fax: +46-18-30 27 53, E-mail: Henrik.Kylin@ma.slu.se

Spectacular display from a Spotted Wren Babbler *Spelaeornis formosus* at Lava, West Bengal

In late March 2002, I visited a ravine in mature evergreen forest, 3 km west of Lava, in West Bengal, where Blue-fronted Robin *Cinclidium frontale* was seen several times in the 1990s. On 29 March 2002, I was observing from the western slope, about 20 m from the streambed. At 07h40, a Spotted Wren Babbler *Spelaeornis formosus*, hidden in low bushes on the streambed, began to sing, continuing, almost without pause, for seven minutes. When it popped into view, it was quivering its barred flight feathers in a fully raised and extended position, above its back. Singing almost non-stop, it hopped diagonally up and left for about 20 m, its quivering wings held aloft. It looped round and down out of sight again, but soon emerged on the near slope below me. As it hopped towards me, it still quivered its wings but started to intersperse short bursts of particularly vibrant song with short sequences of soft *tack* alarm notes. The alarm notes almost overlapped the song, but I am sure that both vocalisations came from the one bird as its bill movements were in full view. The bird was almost continuously visible in the very open ground vegetation around the streambed. It approached me within 5 m before gradually retreating, becoming silent and disappearing.

Despite scanning the area intensely, I did not see a second individual at any time, nor had I used tape solicitation, so I presume that my presence triggered this most elaborate display. I have observed singing wren babblers of 14 different species, many times, but none has performed any display other than particularly vigorous song when at very close range.

Nick Dymond, Springfield, Scousburgh,
Shetland, ZE2 9JE, (Scotland) U.K.

One more comment on captive breeding of Gurney's Pitta

The last two issues of the OBC Bulletin saw a lively discussion of the pros and cons of captive breeding for Gurney's Pitta *Pitta gurneyi*. I would like to add a few further thoughts.

For decades the concern that captive breeding might undermine protection of habitat has been one of the strongest arguments against moving critically endangered species into captivity. Of course, some of those who want to develop the world's last wild places have occasionally suggested moving animals into captivity in order to 'free' a place for development. And while indeed it does happen regularly, that animals (and plants) are being moved – either into captivity or to be released elsewhere – to make space for development, I am still waiting for even a single example to be named where a captive breeding programme, implemented for the recovery of a critically endangered species, has accelerated the destruction of that species' habitat. On the contrary, quite a number of existing captive breeding programmes prove just the opposite:

1) Rounding up the last (and at that time rapidly declining) population of California Condors *Gymnogyps californianus* was delayed until it almost was too late – one of the arguments was that once all the condors were in captivity the incentive for protecting habitat would have gone. However, the sceptics were proved wrong, as the immediate success of the breeding programme (condor numbers increased for the first time in over 100 years) and ensuing enthusiasm stimulated accession of additional protected habitat in anticipation of the (now ongoing) reintroduction programme.
2) Likewise, the success of the breeding and reintroduction programme for the Golden Lion Tamarin *Leontopithecus rosalia* has resulted in much additional protected land – both public and private – in the state of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Whether we like it or not, hands-on management and/or reintroduction of endangered species (especially if they are 'charismatic' or 'beautiful' such as lion tamarins or pittas) attracts much more media attention, than the hard (but seemingly dull) work of 'just' protecting habitat. The Golden Lion Tamarin project has exploited this public interest to the extent that it has now become prestigious for local landowners to protect and even restore forests in order to have the project release tamarins on their land. The project is currently working on replanting corridors to connect various forest patches with naturally occurring or released tamarins.
3) Captive breeding and the availability of captive born Arabian Oryx *Oryx leucoryx* not only stimulated a massive reintroduction programme for the species in Saudi Arabia, but was also the catalyst for starting a much more comprehensive wildlife conservation programme in the country. One may argue that conservation initiatives of some kind would have been implemented in Saudi Arabia sooner or later anyway, but there is no question that the oryx breeding and

reintroduction project speeded up the process considerably.

4) On Mauritius the captive breeding and hands-on recovery work for the endangered endemic birds was a major factor in the declaration of the island's first national park. While debating the need for a protected area in parliament, the Prime Minster, Sir Anerood Jugnanth, quoting the conservation success, said the park was required as somewhere for the endangered birds to live.[1]

By listing these positive examples (and I could add more) I am not denying that many 'captive breeding programmes' do exist that have no or little relevance to conservation (such as most of the existing Captive Breeding Stations scattered around protected areas in Thailand). I am likewise not suggesting that, as a general rule, a captive breeding programme will be likely to have a positive impact on habitat conservation. What I want to suggest is that there is no evidence that initiation of a captive breeding programme is likely to have a negative impact on habitat conservation initiatives. On the contrary, if well-implemented and carried out, it can help to achieve just the opposite. The knowledge of how to negotiate and implement a breeding programme in order to minimize the risk of accidental side effects is there.

Nigel Collar is correct, of course, that such a programme for Gurney's Pitta will be expensive (though perhaps not as expensive as he may think). However, I don't think that his conclusion, that these funds – if available – might better be used for habitat acquisition and restoration, fully reflects reality. Other than the initial costs of building the breeding facility somewhere near Khao Nor Chuchi (KNC), most of the long-term costs would be salaries for personnel (especially at least one full-time professional zoo keeper, who, for the first few years, will probably have to come from a western country and therefore require a comparatively high salary). It is likely that zoos in Europe or the USA will be able to second one of their staff and/or that zoo keepers volunteer for extended periods of time (as many do in the Endangered Primate Rescue Center in Cuc Phuong, Vietnam). Such a contribution to the project would show as a considerable financial investment in the budget, but would not really be available as cash to buy land as Nigel suggests.

Furthermore, the zoo community is becoming an increasingly important funding source for *in-situ* conservation work in general, but the boards of many zoos often demand that conservation projects supported by their zoo should have some connection to what happens in the zoo itself; either by applying knowledge that the zoo has and/or by supporting species that are (or may become in the future) the focus of breeding projects on the zoo grounds itself.

Therefore, I do not really see competition for funds, rather there is potential for extra money to become available. From my own cooperation with zoos (I have never worked for a zoo) I know that zoos want to be seen as serious partners and their expertise in species recovery be seen as complementary to other conservation approaches, not as a threat to habitat protection. Assuming the right mix of action can be agreed upon (including all that is already happening at KNC, some or all of the hands-on recovery actions as suggested by Dieter Rinke and perhaps more), funding from the zoo community for the breeding programme (and associated site security and conservation education work etc.) should not be impossible.

OBC has taken a lead in Gurney's Pitta conservation, for which we should all be immensely grateful. However, if conservation is defined as 'maximising options and minimizing risks' there seems little justification in waiting to implement additional recovery methods (such as some sort of hands-on recovery work) until things get worse than they are. Fifteen pairs at a single site is a fairly high risk scenario already. And if indeed the habitat at KNC is already at carrying capacity, as Nigel suggests, it won't get any better! Accordingly, if we want to conserve the species (that is minimizing the likelihood of it going extinct) the conclusion seems to be that (a) without active habitat replanting, translocation and/or movement into captivity, the species will never ever reach a viable population size and (b) removal of eggs or chicks to captivity can now be done with a low risk to the wild population as due to carrying capacity of the habitat, the population cannot realise its full reproductive potential anyway. So what are we really waiting for?

If OBC Council agrees, I would recommend a meeting of OBC council members with representatives of the EAZA Passerine TAG (the body within the European Zoo Association to deal with breeding programmes for passerine species). The goal of such a meeting would be to discuss and agree on a strategy (including funding), that could be presented to the Thai authorities for approval.

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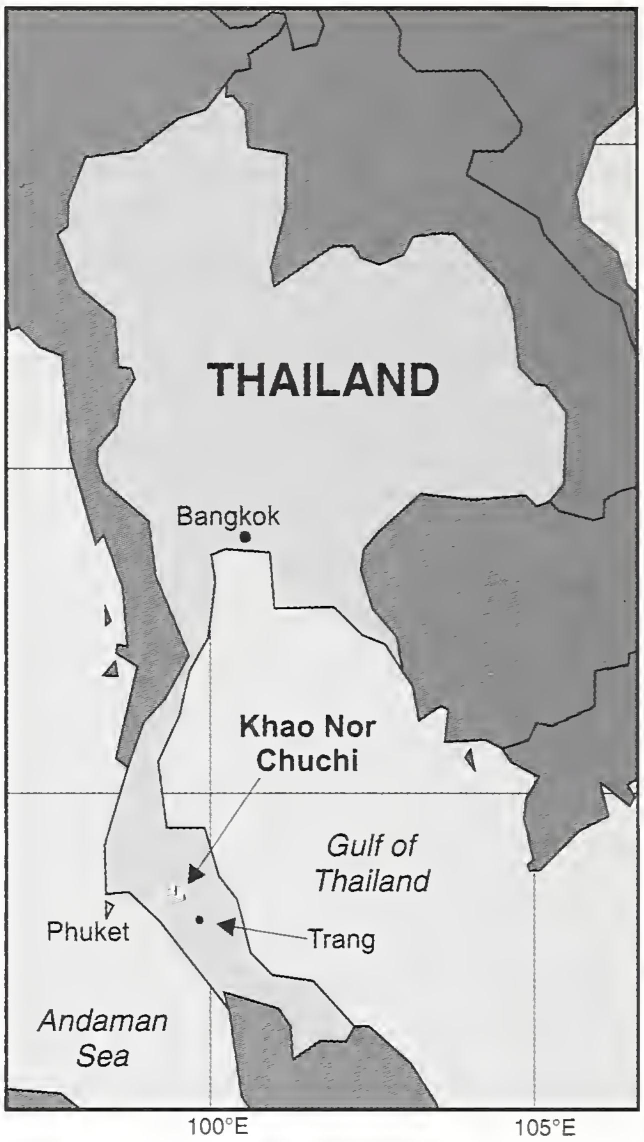
Roland Wirth, Chairman, Zoological Society for the
Conservation of Species & Populations,
Franz-Senn-Str. 14, 81377 München, Germany.
E-mail: roland.wirth@zgap.de

A Temple for Gurney's

Fifteen years of conservation effort and investment in southern Thailand have yet to improve the fate of Gurney's Pitta *Pitta gurneyi* in any meaningful way. Whilst lowland forest habitat remains at KNC – and almost all would have been cleared if not for determined conservation efforts there – not a year has passed without new clearings being established inside the 'protected' forest. Since 1990, the notion that protected area establishment, land-use planning, and particularly rural development, can create the conditions to save the species has strongly influenced on-the-ground action. However, the growing body of literature exposing the theoretical and practical weaknesses of 'developmentalist' conservation creates a mandate and urgency for fresh and innovative approaches.[1–3] In this short note we take a sideways look at the ideas under-pinning past efforts to save Gurney's Pitta and suggest one innovative action to help save the species and its remaining habitat. Other approaches will also of course be necessary.

Contemporary conservation approaches are strongly influenced by biological and economic theory. Both are founded in rationalism, the notion that systems will respond in predictable ways and people will choose the 'best' course of action as measured against the central tenants of these disciplines (e.g. ecosystem stability, sustainability, wealth acquisition, etc.). In reality, how people act depends to a large degree on how they feel, and how they feel is influenced by the meanings they attribute to land, places, events, people, and institutions. Conservation is about creating future landscapes that incorporate nature. To succeed in this endeavour, conservationists must embrace the recognition that people attribute meanings to their surroundings and act accordingly.[4] In short, human culture changes landscapes and culture is embodied by landscapes.[5] The problem with much contemporary conservation policy is that it downplays the emotive relationship between people and land. It assumes that given the 'correct' knowledge and incentive structures people will act in a rational manner. To a degree they will, but only within the framework of their culture – the feelings, meanings and practices of everyday life.



Map showing location of Khao Nor Chuchi

Khao Nor Chuchi (KNC) is situated within a landscape inhabited by first or second-generation pioneer farmers. Their everyday life revolves around 'land' and they are likely to conceive of their surroundings in terms of use and ownership: the smallholdings and homesteads of fellow settlers, plantations owned by the more wealthy, and forest that is 'still to be claimed'. Within their belief and livelihood systems, the notion of reserving land as a wildlife sanctuary or nature reserves is not intuitively understandable. Such designations represent the language and purpose of government, and frontier people tend to view edicts of government with a mixture of suspicion, scepticism and resistance.

Conservationists working in the landscape of KNC have aligned themselves with government and have articulated the notion that community livelihoods will be advanced if they protect Gurney's Pitta and the last remnants of its forest habitat. From the perspective of pioneer farmers, the propositions that an owner will manage land for the greater good and that money can be made from ecotourism and sustainable use of natural forest must seem highly improbable. Quite possibly, they may view the actions of conservationists as just one more trick on the part of vested interests to secure forest land for their own selfish ends. As a result they will want to stake their own claim to forest land, and in frontier landscapes the main mechanism to do this is to cut the forest and cultivate the land. To break out of this bind, conservationists need to articulate meanings for land that are consistent with people's belief systems and dissociate notions of ownership from financial gain. One such meaning is that of 'sacred forest'. This concept is familiar to peoples in many regions of Asia, and in Thailand there is an ancient and widespread 'system' of sacred forests.[6]

The concept of 'sacred forest' could unify the belief systems of people inhabiting the landscape of KNC with the beliefs and values that motivate conservationists to try and save Gurney's Pitta. In 1988, John Parr and one of us (PJ) spent six weeks surveying for Gurney's Pitta in frontier landscapes of Surat Thani Province. On one occasion we were told that local people talked about us with some reverence because they assumed we must be monks of some sort. They saw two ragged, young western men, travelling by bus, bike and foot, living frugally and with whoever would offer hospitality, and spending all their days in the forest searching for some mythical bird. By thinking of us as monks, they were enrolling us in their everyday world through endowing us with characteristics consistent with their belief systems. Spirituality is fundamental to Thai culture and identity, and even those who give little thought to such matters intuitively embrace spiritual concepts when interpreting their surroundings and the actions of others.

Farmers of KNC want to make money from forest land, but their belief systems on this issue are entrenched – log it, clear it and plant coffee, rubber or oil palm. The forests that Thai people willingly conserve are those that are deemed sacred; traditionally most villages have a sacred tree, grove and/or forest.[6] Therefore, perhaps the solution to saving Gurney's Pitta is to 'construct' the last remnants of its habitat as being sacred. Treating KNC as a sacred forest is consistent with the belief systems of local people and the function that OBC and others desire to assign to this land, namely protection of Gurney's Pitta. Whether or not birders consider themselves religious, much of the motivation to watch birds can be viewed as spiritual. Most of us have at some time felt something deeper when sitting quietly waiting for a bird, or when watching a bird of great beauty or majesty. Our motives for travelling to KNC are certainly not related to financial gain, and it is too shallow to suggest that adding another tick on the list is sufficient motivation. Most birders travel to KNC simply to wonder at, and contemplate, the beauty that Gurney's Pitta embodies. With such motivations, birders are in effect making a pilgrimage and associating Gurney's Pitta and its forest habitat with a set of beliefs, values, attitudes, emotions and rituals. In short, by acts of congregating to see Gurney's Pitta and mounting campaigns to save its habitat we treat the forests of KNC in a sacred manner. In our view, the people of KNC will relate to this proposition and therefore we should make it a basis of our arguments for forest protection.

To communicate this message and sanctify the forest we could purchase a parcel of land and build a temple or shrine designed in a way that makes the link between the structure, Gurney's Pitta, the forest and the 'pilgrim birders' coming to the area. Once constructed, visiting birders could reinforce the sacred nature of KNC by visiting the temple, leaving a small offering or perhaps pinning up a passport photo. If the concept found widespread support, a more ambitious and high profile sanctification could be made. Taking inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi, birders from Thailand and around the world could march to the temple to pay their respects and request local support for this 'sacred forest'.

The purpose of communication is co-ordination of social behaviour.[7] Reaching common meanings is central to effective social action. In spoken language metaphor plays a crucial role in conveying meaning. Because metaphors are difficult to translate, symbolic acts have a far more important role in cross-cultural communication. By the symbolic act of building a temple we (birders) could for the first time communicate honestly and clearly about why we want Khao Nor Chuchi to survive. At the very least a temple would provide a meaningful explanation to people of the region as to why people from all over the whole world travel to their otherwise unremarkable bit of Thailand. Perhaps also, we would be honest about the difficulty of saving the bird by any means other than appealing to mankind's potential to rise above everyday and immediate needs. If we fail, and Gurney's Pitta becomes extinct, then we would have created a poignant shrine to mankind's destructive power over the natural world.

Ultimately, conservation is about proposing solutions to which people will willingly subscribe. We suggest that all levels of Thai society will understand and hopefully support the concept of KNC as a sacred forest. Because religion and state, as well as the sacred and secular, are not always separate in Thailand,[6] to do otherwise would be to deny and reject central tenets of their national and individual identities. Moreover, the expression of spirituality requires no mandate. If birders feel this way we can just do it.

Returning to the theme of our opening paragraph, we are acutely aware that the bird conservation community is struggling to deliver what is expected of it – saving birds from extinction in the wild. In part this is because of the conceptual straitjacket that conservationists are currently operating in, including a denial of the emotive and spiritual dimension to the extinction crisis. This article is a call for concerned individuals to challenge convention and throw new ideas into the ring. Every conservation situation requires a tailor-made solution. The difficulties facing bird and habitat conservation in Asia are such that no-one should feel shy about presenting and advancing a considered idea.

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Paul Jepson, School of Geography and the Environment, Oxford University, Oxford OX1 3TB, UK, E-mail: paul.jepson@geog.ox.ac.uk

Richard Grimmett, c/o BirdLife International Asia Programme, Jl. Dadali No. 32, Tanah Sareal, Bogor 16161, Indonesia. E-mail: richardg@indo.net.id

The opinions expressed by the authors of this article are personal and not necessarily those of their respective institutions.

A Temple for Gurney's – a rejoinder

In 'A Temple for Gurney's', Paul Jepson and Richard Grimmett advance the thesis that conventional conservation efforts have failed to conserve Gurney's Pitta because western conservationists do not understand how societies, especially oriental societies, perceive landscapes. '. . . Conservationists need to articulate meanings for land that are consistent with people's belief systems and dissociate notions of ownership from financial gain.' To this end, they advocate an approach based on the concept of sacred forests, and suggest building a temple or shrine dedicated to Gurney's Pitta as a means to advance locals' appreciation of the importance attached by outsiders to conserving the bird and its habitat.

We would agree that the premise that local people will effectively conserve an area based on recognition of possible future financial gain from e.g., ecotourism, or through adopting sustainable development, so called 'Integrated Conservation and Development' is shaky. On the other hand, though, we may accuse Jepson and Grimmett of doing exactly what they accuse others of doing: i.e., failing to understand local perceptions concerning land. In their case, we believe they are seeing the situation through a rose-tinted fog of idealistic western misconceptions about the supposed spirituality of eastern cultures, and the universality of animistic beliefs that have long fallen into abeyance. They mistakenly assume that these latter can be applied to advance conservation goals.

In fact, land has long been regarded as a resource to be exploited, owned, and traded in Thailand as in much of the rest of the world. The main engine for the canalisation of Thailand's swampy Lower Central Plain in the mid to late nineteenth century was a land-grab by the scions of the Siamese aristocracy, and by the growing Chinese merchant class, fuelled by an appreciation of the profits which could be made by selling rice and sugar-cane in the emerging global market. Since that time, millions of small farmers have adopted the same approach, clearing and laying claim to forest in order to sell cash-crops. Most of those presently living and farming in the national reserve forest at Khao Nor Chuchi (KNC) entered the area since 1980 from neighbouring provinces 100–200 km distant. Spirituality or deep-rooted attachment to any particular place or community is a luxury that few claim to be able to afford. Cut a tree down and the spirits are easily placated by the erection of a small wooden or concrete spirit-house. Sacred groves are a total anachronism today, and even when found, exist on too small a scale (a few hectares at most) to have any relevance to conserving viable populations of forest birds or other vertebrates.

In our view, the principal misconception that has dogged efforts to conserve Gurney's Pitta was the supposition that, based on an understanding of its basic needs, and an appreciation of the acute threats it faced, Thailand's government conservation authorities would act appropriately to safeguard Gurney's Pitta habitat at KNC. However, more than fifteen years later, an appropriate level of formalised and long-term commitment to habitat protection is still lacking. The wildlife sanctuary supposedly established to conserve the species does not even encompass its core (lowland) habitat. Roughly 2/3 of all pairs of Gurney's Pittas known are situated outside the sanctuary boundary, in national reserve forest land where, during 1995 to 1999, over 160 new clearings covering 407 ha were documented by the KNC Lowland Forest Project. Penalties for encroachment of national reserve forest land at KNC, as elsewhere in Thailand, are mild or (to state it as charitably as we can) were not consistently applied, and were therefore insufficient to offset the financial gains either from selling cash crops, or from clearing land and selling it to someone else. (In fact, nobody was prosecuted for any of the clearings mentioned above.)

Our experience at KNC, as elsewhere, does not entirely invalidate those development approaches which seek to bolster communities' commitment to conserving habitat through promoting financial incentives. But it does illustrate their likely ineffectiveness unless they are accompanied by stringent law enforcement that penalises those who put personal gain ahead of communal benefits.

In fact, we would argue that the solution to land-use conflicts at KNC may be relatively simple. Conservationists should adopt the belief-system understood only too well by the KNC settlers and other small farmers—that of the marketplace—and seek to purchase land from those willing to sell. After all, land exchanges hands, without legal documentation, in commercial transactions among older settlers and new immigrants almost constantly. One could envisage a situation where small purchases of already-cleared land are made under a strategic framework, and forest allowed to regenerate, gradually linking up remaining forest patches. The holdings could be enlarged gradually, whenever and wherever expedient. Within few decades, KNC would comprise a large, private, forest nature reserve in the lowlands adjacent to, and contiguous with, the wildlife sanctuary.

Such a strategy has been used elsewhere in the tropics with some success, and has been advocated for use at KNC by several western conservationists and reserve managers. But it has so far not been adopted anywhere in Thailand by either government or private conservation bodies. The authorities argue that since the land is already owned by government, as national reserve forest, it cannot be purchased as such. However, smallholders may be 'compensated' for the crops they have planted, at a level that might encourage them to settle elsewhere. It could be that all the conservationists need to do is to talk to those government officials in a position to approve such a policy (perhaps through granting a lease over the national reserve forest area at KNC to a Thai wildlife conservation body. That body would then be free to negotiate with those willing to sell). The snag, of course, is that government would still be required to provide a level of protection to remaining forest patches which is appropriate to ensure these are not cleared—something it has so far failed to do. There are also many other uncertainties, but nevertheless a programme of non-compulsory land purchase, using funds raised from the international conservation community, seems to offer the most hopeful way forward. This would reduce conflict between villagers and government authorities, and convince Thai government of the sincere, long-term commitment of the conservation community. It would also be a better use of funds than spending them on romantic notions such as temples and (arguably only slightly less fanciful) integrated conservation and development projects.

We thank our colleague Dr. George Gale for his comments on this letter.

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Philip Round, Department of Biology,
Faculty of Science, Mahidol University,
Rama 6 Road, Bangkok 10400.

Klos Boonthavee, c/o Bird Conservation Society of
Thailand, 69/12 Ramindra 24,
Jarakhebua, Lard Prao, Bangkok 10230

Recently Published

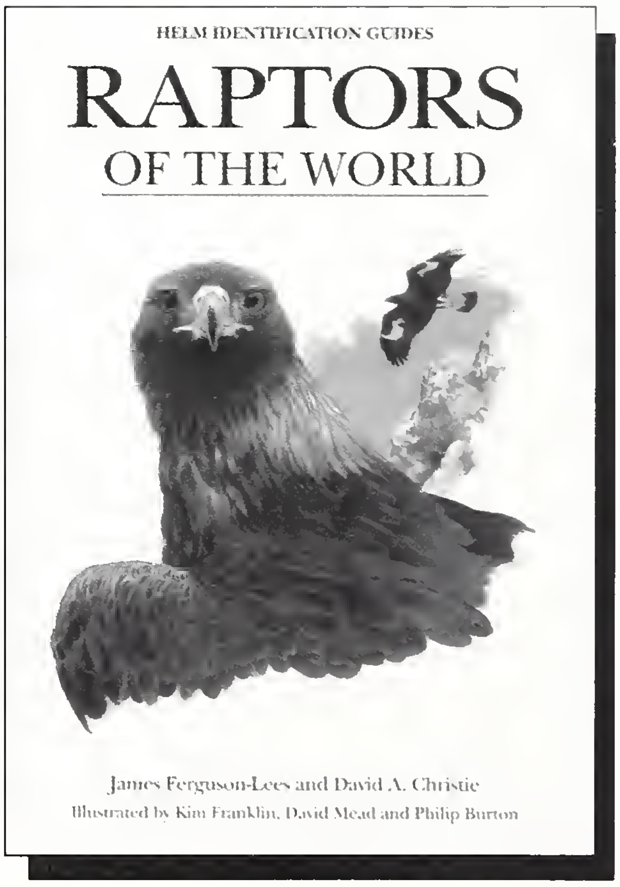
Raptors of the World. *James Ferguson-Lees and David Christie, illustrated by Kim Franklin, David Mead and Philip Burton. Christopher Helm, London. 2001. 992 pages; 112 colour plates, 60 line drawings, 313 colour maps. Hardback £49. ISBN 0-7136-8026-1.*

Raptors will always pose some of the most difficult identification challenges, even for the most experienced birders. Whilst many species are relatively easy to identify, a significant number are certainly not, especially in immature and subadult plumages. This book will help identify these, though its size makes it unlikely that many people will take it into the field. Considering the poor attention to field identification in previous global reviews of raptors, and indeed the often inadequate detail provided in field guides, this volume will be very welcome, though it should be noted that the field identification features for those species occurring in the Western Palearctic are already well described and illustrated in other books. Those raptors in the Oriental region are a different matter – many remain difficult to identify, even with good views, and despite some excellent recent field guides to birds in the Oriental region (e.g. Grimmett *et al.* 1999, Kazmierczak 2000, Robson 2000).

The format of the book is typical of the Helm Identification Guide series, but includes some sections not usually found in these books. For example, there is a useful section entitled 'Sex and age differences in sizes and shapes of raptors' and another on 'Raptor moult patterns and age criteria'. In all there are 79 pages of introductory text before the detailed species accounts. One feature that this book has that is not usually found in identification guides are two sets of maps for all species; a colour map opposite the plate depicting the species, and another, more detailed black-and-white map within the text. Illustrations are generally good and accurate, though space constraints have presumably meant that the full variation in plumages of many species could not be illustrated.

The book covers 313 taxa that are recognised as species, but some of the taxonomy followed in this book might be considered to be unacceptable by some readers, although it is never possible to satisfy everyone with taxonomic decisions. For example, 13 species of Indomalayan serpent-eagles are recognised, in comparison to only six in the OBC Checklist. The splits all refer to populations on small islands; thus there are endemics in Great Nicobar and Central Nicobar (instead of just 'Nicobar' Serpent-eagle);.in Simeulue, Nias, Mentawai, Natuna, Bawean and the Ryukyu islands. On the other hand, such decisiveness was not applied to the many taxa presently treated as Varied Goshawk *Accipiter hiogaster*, or to those taxa included in Changeable Hawk-eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus*, some of which are perhaps good species. Furthermore, 'Black-eared Kite' (*lineatus*) is considered to be the same species as Black Kite *M. migrans*, and 'Eastern Marsh Harrier' (*spilinotus*) is treated as a subspecies of Northern Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, in contrast to the treatment by some recent authors. The authors were presumably too late to include the recent revelation that the 'long-billed vultures' in the Indian subcontinent are represented by two species that are 'extraordinarily distinct', and not even each other's closest relatives: Slender-billed Vulture *Gyps tenuirostris* and Indian Vulture *G. indicus* (both of which are Critically Endangered) (Rasmussen and Parry 2000).

Whilst recent field guides have all greatly improved the prospects for identifying raptors in


HELM IDENTIFICATION GUIDES
RAPTORS
OF THE WORLD
James Ferguson-Lees and David A. Christie
Illustrated by Kim Franklin, David Mead and Philip Burton

the field, *Raptors of the World* has the potential to further improve one's ability to identify certain raptors, and for the keen Oriental birder this is certainly a key book. Finally, it should be mentioned that this is extremely good value for money when compared to the many other similar type of bird family/group guides now available.

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Rasmussen, P. C. and Parry, S. J. (2000). On the specific distinctness of the Himalayan Long-billed Vulture *Gyps* [*indicus*] *tenuirostris*. Abstract, p.64 in 118th Stated Meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union. St John's, Newfoundland: Memorial University of Newfoundland.

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Frank Lambert
<Franklambert@postmaster.co.uk>

Handbook of the Birds of the World. Volume 7: Jacamars to Woodpeckers. *Edited by Josep del Hoyo, Andrew Elliott and Jordi Sargatal. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, 2002. 613 pages, 49 colour plates, many colour photos. Hardback £110. ISBN 84-87334-37-7.*

The seventh volume of HBW completes the non-passerines and is thoughtfully supplied with a separate laminated index to the first seven volumes. Once again, we are presented with a feast of superb photographs, authoritative text and impressive plates. This volume covers two Orders; the Galbuliformes (jacamars and puffbirds, confined to the Neotropics), and the more widespread Piciformes, which include two families that are very familiar to Oriental ornithology, the barbets and woodpeckers. The honeyguides, represented in the Oriental Region by two rather elusive species, are also featured.

Woodpeckers are represented in the Oriental Region by 61 species, of which only three are to be found to the east of Wallace's Line; this represents more than a quarter of the 216 species described in HBW; furthermore, nearly one third of the 'true' woodpeckers, of the subfamily Picinae, occur in the region. As in previous volumes, the illustrations include many taxa that have not been widely illustrated, and hence show the remarkable variation present in some species. Being able directly to compare illustrations of the recognised subspecies of a number of species provides a good clue to where further taxonomic work would be beneficial; it is hard to believe, for example, that all the taxa included under *Chrysocolaptes lucidus* can really be Greater Flamebacks, whilst looking at the illustrations of taxa such as *Picus canus dedemi* (an inhabitant of the mountain rain forests of Sumatra), and of the nominate Javan subspecies of Blue-eared Barbet *Megalaima australis*, leads to questions about the possibility of misclassified island endemics.

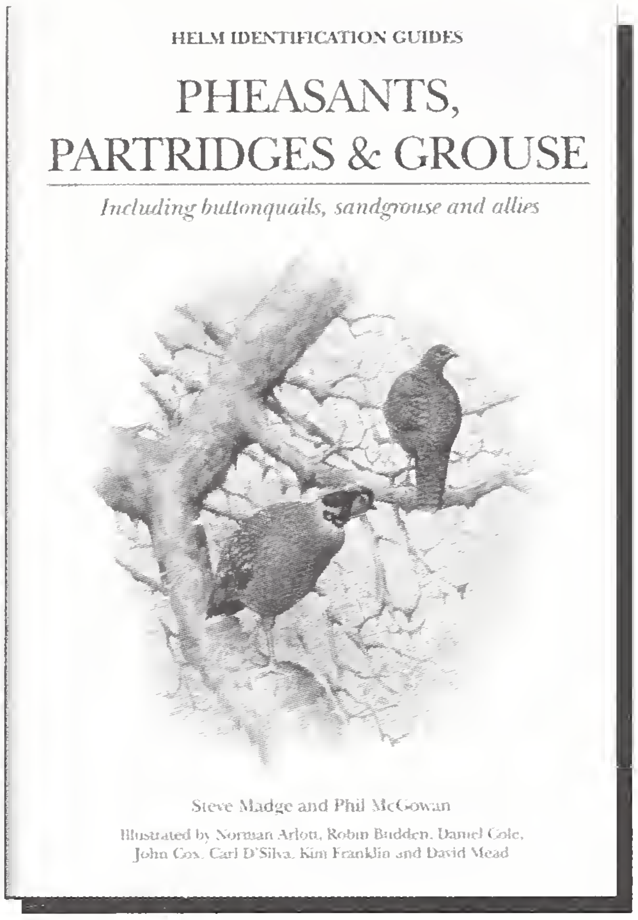
In Volume 6 of the series, a section on vocalisations was introduced, but this has been dropped again in Volume 7. I believe that this was a wise decision since there is insufficient space to describe adequately the vocalisation of most species. There has been a commendable attempt to improve the value of the distributional maps by more careful depiction of the actual ranges than in previous volumes.

Extinct birds are the focus of the 58-page Foreword by Errol Fuller. This makes fascinating, though somewhat depressing reading. A number of Oriental species are featured, including Crested Shelduck and Pink-headed Duck, although there is still a very slim (but rapidly diminishing) chance that these still survive. This Foreword, and the recently completed *Threatened Birds of Asia* – with more than 3,000 pages, an equivalent to more than two volumes of HBW – provides a strong reminder of the threats that now face so many Oriental species, and suggests the fact that any future edition of HBW may require a considerably expanded section on extinct birds unless conservation is taken a lot more seriously by the world's governments.

Overall, as with previous volumes in this series, Volume 7 of HBW is impressive and will prove to be a useful source of reference for anyone interested in Oriental ornithology. The photographs alone should convince most readers who can afford it that this is something worth adding to your bird book collection.

Finally, it seems worth suggesting to the editors of HBW that a CD-Rom for the Non-passerines of the world would probably be a very welcome spin-off for those who cannot easily transport this informative series, or wish to search quickly for information on their computer. Waiting until the next nine volumes are completed before providing us with the inevitable CD would seem to me to be unnecessary.

Frank Lambert
<Franklambert@postmaster.co.uk>


HELM IDENTIFICATION GUIDES
PHEASANTS, PARTRIDGES & GROUSE
Including buttonquails, sandgrouse and allies
Steve Madge and Phil McGowan
Illustrated by Norman Arlott, Robin Budden, Daniel Cole, John Cox, Carl D'Silva, Kim Franklin and David Mead

Pheasants, Partridges and Grouse: a Guide to the Pheasants, Partridges, Quails, Grouse, Guineafowl, Buttonquails and Sandgrouse of the World. *By Steve Madge and Phil McGowan, with Guy M. Kirwan. Christopher Helm, London, 2002. 488 pages, 72 colour plates; 252 maps. Hardback £45. ISBN 0-7136-3966-0.*

Another well-produced book from the Helm Identification Guide series, this book covers not only the Phasianidae, which are of great interest and allure to Oriental birders, but also the distantly related buttonquails, sandgrouse and even the Plains-wanderer (an aberrant wader, endemic to Australia). In all, 253 species are covered, with colour illustrations and distribution maps for all except the enigmatic Double-banded Argus *Argusianus bipunctatus*, known from a single primary feather of uncertain origin.

I have no doubt that many readers will enjoy looking through and using this book, and, whilst it is likely to prove to be the most useful book currently available on the groups covered for most birders, I was a bit disappointed by some aspects. For example, whilst the Helm identification guides we are accustomed to usually contain a good introductory section, this particular book inexplicably has only 1.5 pages – perhaps because there are a number of relatively recent alternative treatises in which more comprehensive accounts are available. A few of the maps are also rather misleading; for example, those for Black Wood-partridge *Melanoperdix nigra* and Long-billed Partridge *Rhizothera longirostris* suggest that both species occur throughout the entire island of Sumatra, which is far from the truth, especially now that so much of that island has been deforested. On the other hand, the occurrence of the former in the upper reaches of the Barito River in Kalimantan (central Borneo) appears to have been overlooked. Additional maps (within the text section) to show the distribution of certain subspecies would have been a useful addition. Some of the plates contain rather a large amount of space, whereas better planning might have allowed for the illustration of more plumages. It should have been possible to illustrate male Hoogerwerf's Pheasant, since, as noted in the text, some are held in an aviary in Java.

The authors appear to have virtually neglected one important source of additional information: the field notebooks of Oriental birders. They have hence missed an opportunity to include many observations that for various reasons have never been published. During the last few years, for example, Salvadori's Pheasant *Lophura inornata*, has been found to occur in forests down to at least 600m in some parts of its range (and perhaps as low as 200m), whilst Sumatran Peacock-pheasant *Polyplectron chalcurum* is known to survive in areas dominated by scrub rather than by forest. Nevertheless, the text does contain much information that is recent and which has not appeared in previous books on pheasants, partridges, buttonquails, etc.

The taxonomy followed in this book has been well-researched and frequently provides a brief commentary on recent views. Thus, a number of taxa of *Arborophila* partridges have been elevated to species level, although the recent discovery of Chestnut-headed Partridges *A. cambodiana* that are intermediate in plumage between two taxa split in this book, namely *cambodiana* and *diversa*, suggests that the original treatment as one species was probably correct (see *Forktail* 18: 67–86). The recently discovered but undescribed 'white-tailed monal pheasant' from Arunachal Pradesh is tentatively treated as a form of Sclater's Monal *Lophophorus sclateri*, whilst the presentation of the illustration and account on Imperial Pheasant *Lophura imperialis* suggest that the authors do not fully accept that this is a hybrid. On the other hand, the fact that there is a growing opinion that Edwards's Pheasant *L. edwardsi* and Vietnamese Pheasant *L. hatinhensis* are probably conspecific is clearly acknowledged.

With numerous bird books coming on to the market every month, it is becoming more of a necessity to choose carefully which books to buy. Whilst not an essential addition to the Oriental birder's library, this book will prove very useful to anyone who does not already possess the various other comprehensive accounts of the groups covered. The illustrations alone will probably give many readers an added determination to visit or re-visit the Orient and invest more time in looking for the many marvellous species depicted. Male pheasants, in particular, are amongst the many 'cripplers' that can make Oriental birding so rewarding, or at other times, so frustrating. Reading the relevant text in this book before your next trip may just tip the balance in your favour when you eventually look for them, so that you return rewarded, rather than frustrated!

Frank Lambert
<Franklambert@postmaster.co.uk>

The birds of North Korea. Non-Passeriformes *by T. Tomek (1999). Acta Zoologica Cracoviensia 42(1): 1-217;* and **The birds of North Korea. Passeriformes** *by T. Tomek (2002). Acta Zoologica Cracoviensia 45(1): 1-235. Price US$45, including postage, for both volumes. Orders and enquiries to: Zofia Malcher (malcher@isez.pan.krakow.pl)*

Not since Austin (1948) has the avifauna of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) been reviewed internationally. The last Korean-language presentation was Won Hong Koo (1963-1965). Tomek's 450+ page catalogue details information available now. Each species' map plots individual records, the text giving (for each) the site name, date(s) of occurrence, and information source. Maps/text neither give numbers recorded, nor detail breeding evidence or altitude; in many original sources, this information simply isn't there. Prose discusses national distribution, seasonality, abundance (including trends), and status in neighbouring countries. Introductory sections detail sources and provide a 'how to use...' guide. A 14-page gazetteer gives co-ordinates and alternative spellings for each site, and maps all sites with records (alas, not graded by coverage): required study to interpret the species maps. Conclusions, on the avian faunistics of DPRK, cover only three pages, as explained in the eternal line 'existing knowledge about the occurrence of birds...one should call it rather "state of ignorance"...far from a satisfactory presentation'.

In fact, it is a very satisfactory presentation of what is known: discussion is curtailed because so little *is* known. Moreover, much Korean information is questionable – re-written specimen labels with transcription errors, contradictory information in different works – and Tomek takes a brisk attitude to exposing such inconsistencies. Some patterns in the dataset (e.g., out-of-season summer visitors predominantly from southern provinces) suggest its basic soundness, although to rely on any single Korean record would be folly. This dataset gives working hypotheses; a future Hong Kong-style records overhaul (see Carey *et al.* 2001) will be needed. Using MacKinnon and Phillips' (2000) maps for distributional comparison is indefensible, especially because some howlers are exposed here. Some compilation errors are inevitable, but the desirability of checking original sources is standard in science, not a mark against this work. A card index in Cracow, accessible to visiting researchers, holds otherwise unpublished data.

Some species' status assessments are premature, but the detailed presentation allows readers to draw conclusions independently. It also shows the great gaps in even basic information on status and distribution of birds of DPRK. For now, this catalogue reaffirms, in this era of garbage-in, garbage-out computer databases compiled and operated by people bereft of relevant field experience, the value of diligent record-by-record presentation by someone fully astride the subject. Essential to anyone interested in north-east Asian birds, it sets new standards for national bird status overviews in that region.

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Will Duckworth

Stray Feathers

Birds of South Korea video

Wetlands and Birds Korea (WBK) recently released their '*Birds of South Korea*' video, made to promote wetland conservation and the birds of both the Yellow Sea eco-region and of South Korea. The video is three hours long and highlights conservation, taxonomy, and identification issues in what is still a relatively unknown country.

The video has been made as part of a WKB conservation project by Nial and Charlie Moores, and Kim Sukyung – a Korean wetland activist and a founder member of WBK.

All profits from the video will be used to support WBK work in South Korea (education, project development, survey work, eco-tourism etc), and to finance the production of two further videos – one to promote birdwatching and demonstrate field skills for sale within South Korea itself, and the second to promote WBK work at the upcoming Ramsar Convention.

The video is available from WBKEnglish, 32 Littlecote Road, Chippenham, Wilts, SN14 0NY, UK and costs £19.95 (+£2 p&p), or $US32, Euros 33. See www.wbkenglish.com.

Lookout for spoonbills...

Dr Kim Sooil of Korea National University of Education, South Korea has colour-banded eight first-year Black-faced Spoonbills *Platalea minor* (from four nests) on Sok-do and Bi-do in South Korea, June 2002.

Long red bands were put on the right tibiae of the birds and three colour bands of different combinations were placed on the left. Metal rings were put on the right tarsi of the birds.

The rings read:

1) K31 - right tibia, Red-Green-Blue combination rings on left tibia, plus metal ring, number 140-00471 Korea on right tarsus.
2) K32 - Red-Green-White, 140-00472.
3) K33 - Red-White-Red, 140-00473.
4) K34 - Red-White-Yellow, 140-00474.
5) K35 - Red-White-Blue, 140-00475.
6) K36 - Red-White-Green, 140-00476.
7) K37 - Yellow-Red-Yellow, 140-004777.
8) K38 - Yellow-Red-Blue, 140-00478.

Please report sighting of the birds to Dr. Kim at sooil@cc.knue.ac.kr

New Salim Ali conservation award

The Bombay Natural History Society has instituted a biannual 'Salim Ali International Award for Nature Conservation' for outstanding contributions and achievements in the fields of protection, management and conservation of natural resources including human population, wildlife, pollution and hazardous material control, education, information and legislation. For an application form please contact bnhs@bom4.vsnl.net.in

Photo requests

Indian *Aquila* eagles

As mentioned in *Around the Orient*, page 38, an article on the identification of Indian *Aquila* eagles is in preparation. Taxa to be treated will include the three species in the Steppe Eagle clade (Imperial Eagle *A. heliaca*, Steppe Eagle *A. nipalensis* and Tawny Eagle *A. rapax vindhiana*), the two 'spotted eagles' and Indian Spotted Eagle *Aquila hastata* now recognised as a valid species in its own right and no longer considered a subspecies of Lesser Spotted Eagle *A. pomarina*. As such we are requesting photos of these taxa, in particular *A. hastata*. It would be excellent the legs and feet of perched eagles are visible. It would also be very useful if there was video/DVD footage available to the artist and author. Any audio recordings of vocalisations of these birds would be useful too. Please send any material, which will be returned upon publication of the article, to the club address. Alternatively, contact the editors via the club E-mail address.

Tytler's Leaf Warbler

Photos of Tytler's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus tytleri* are also requested for an article on the field identification of this species too. Correspondence to the addresses above please.

THE ORIENTAL BIRD CLUB BULLETIN provides a forum for news, notices, recent publications, expedition results, reviews and preliminary or interim publication of studies on Oriental birds by contributors from all parts of the world. Publication of interim results in the OBC Bulletin does not preclude publication of final results as journal papers either by the OBC or elsewhere. Contributions are considered by the Editor and an Editorial Committee with contributions accepted subject to editing and refereeing where appropriate. Copies of new journals, books or reports for mention or reviewing are always welcomed. Contributions or enquiries should be sent to the Bulletin Editor, Oriental Bird Club, P.O. Box 324, Bedford, MK42 0WG, UK or email to <mail@orientalbirdclub.org>.

Guidelines for contributors

Whilst the Editor is always pleased to discuss possible contributions with potential authors, and to advise on preparation, it would be helpful if the following guidelines could be adhered to:

1. **Articles** These should be written clearly, preferably typed, on one side of the page, with all lines double-spaced, leaving wide margins, and should be no longer than 2,000 words. Scientific names should appear at the first mention of each species or, if all species appear in a table, they may be given there instead. Scientific names should, where possible, follow T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey and W. Duckworth (1996) *An annotated checklist of the birds of the Oriental Region*.

   Any tables to accompany articles should be prepared on separate pieces of paper, and be thoroughly checked. Titles of tables should be self-explanatory. Diagrams should be clearly drawn, in ink, ideally 15 cm wide and 11 cm high. References should be cited in the order in which they appear during the paper in the same style used in this Bulletin.

   It would be helpful if two copies of each contribution could be submitted, and also if possible the text submitted on a computer disk, ideally in Microsoft Word, in either PC or Macintosh format.

2. **From the field** These should follow the format in the current edition of the OBC Bulletin, and be sent to the Bulletin Editor, Oriental Bird Club, P.O. Box 324, Bedford, MK42 0WG, UK.

3. **News/Information** Typed or handwritten contributions should be sent to the Bulletin Editor, Oriental Bird Club, P.O. Box 324, Bedford, MK42 0WG, UK.

Although every effort is made to retain all articles in their submitted form, the Editorial Committee reserves the right to make changes that it deems necessary, and, in a minimum of cases, without prior reference to the author. It is assumed that all contributors submitting material understand and accept these conditions. All contributors, photographers and artists, in submitting material for the OBC Bulletin, also give permission for their work to be used in the OBC Internet pages.

For Around the Orient, Recently Published, Stray Feathers and Free Press, the deadline for submission of material is 28th February (June Bulletin) and 31st August (December Bulletin). The deadlines do not apply to main articles which will be published as soon as possible after acceptance by the Editorial Committee.

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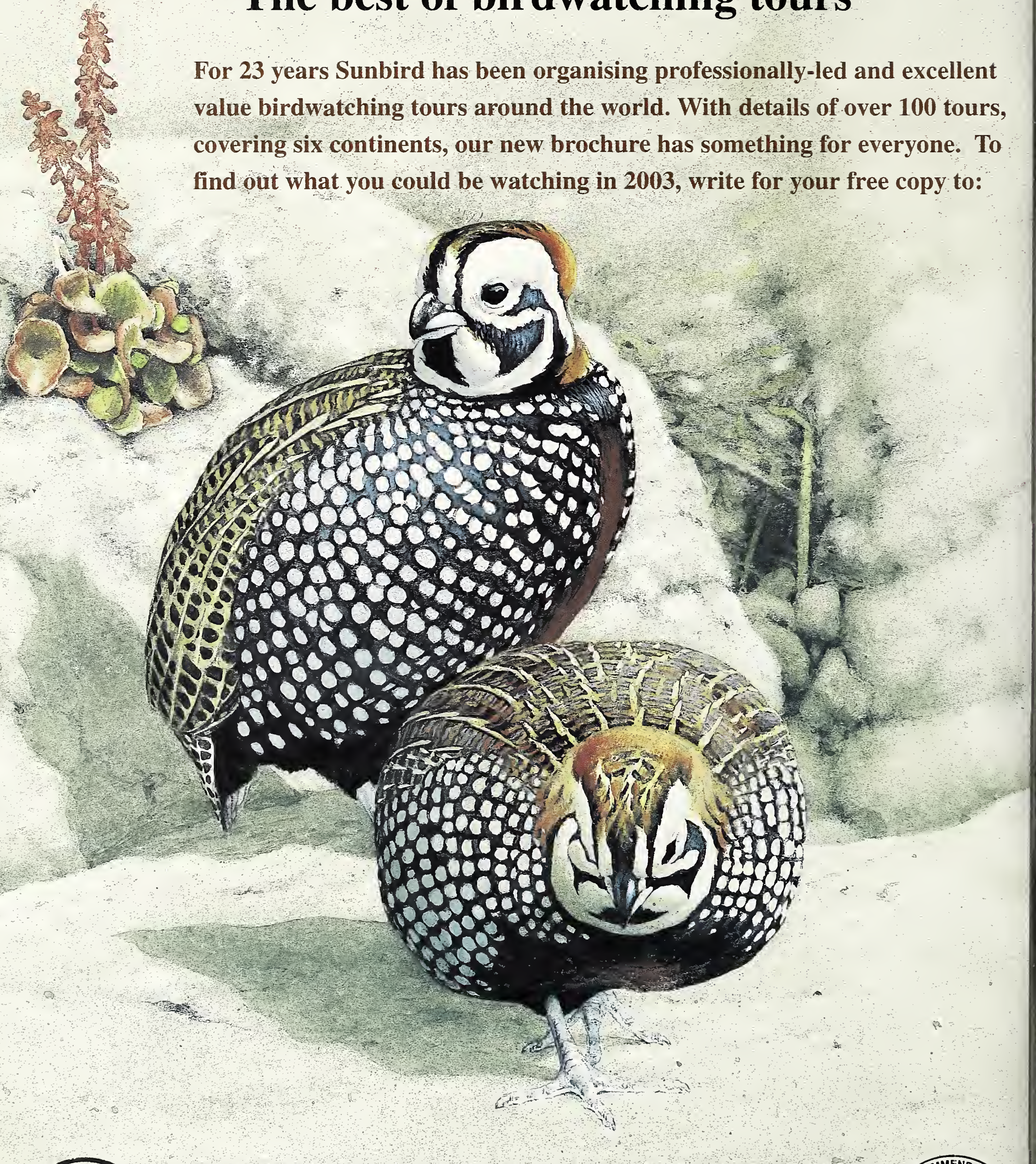

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Sunbird OB, PO Box 76, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 1DF, Great Britain
Telephone: 01767 682969 Fax: 01767 692481
Email: sunbird@sunbirdtours.co.uk
Or visit our web site: www.sunbird.demon.co.uk

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